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PLUS: Sarah Baxter on Labour's woman troubles; Agnes Fletcher on the new disability activism; Anthony Giddens: the case for left conservatism; John Berger

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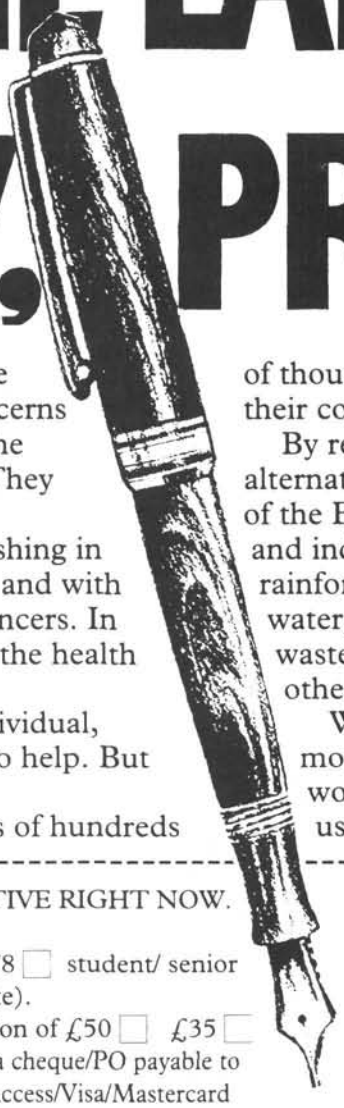

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Fund raising fever pitch

Defence fund raising reaches fever pitch on Sunday, October 31 with a football game between *New Statesman* staff and Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO). Our player-manager is Sean French – who proved his worth by guiding our celebrity cricket team to victory in Huntingdon – who is banking on goals from the look-alike England captain (albeit beard) Steve Platt. French promises a game of two halves, with a result at the end of the day, Brian. Everyone is welcome to join NSS supporters ringing Regents Park (Pitch 5) for the 10.30am kick-off, followed by pub analysis at The Queen's, on the junction of Regents Park Road and Primrose Hill Road, at 12.30pm.

A big thank you to everyone who has donated to the Defence Fund and especially our 5,000th contributor, Steve Cooke – a third-year geography student. "It's important that *NSS* keeps going so that not all the press is controlled by right-wing views," says Steve, who can be identified at St David's University College, Lampeter, as much by the well-read *NSS* in his hand as his Defence Fund "Don't Think . . . " T-shirt.

Our thanks this week to:

H Caesar, R Mitchell, M Newman, JA Scott, M.M Rogers, Dave, Eva & Wendy Backhouse, Wendy Johnson, WM Ferguson, Julian Rathbone, Prof KRM Williamson, Andrew Hargrave, Bob Maddox, Sarla Bhavnani, Robert JB Anderson, Ken Ryder, HJ Fyrth, TA Lynes, DK Havergal Shaw, Pauline Gaunt, Robert Peterson, Wendy Foulger, V Mathur, Jenny Vaughan, B Crowley, Margaret Marshall, Margot Jefferys, Leonard E Lethby, Dr John Margetts, R P Tomsett, Mr & Mrs WA Edwards, Tim Edwards, Nigel Bartlett, Gordon & Stephanie Logie, AM Marin, Dr Graham Don, The Lord McCluskey, Ellen Dahrendorf, RA Brenan, Alison Finch, Paul Payne, Dr FG Friedlander, Muriel Russell, Waveney CLP, DP Frost, Hugh & Isobel Johnson, BN Lewis, VC Brittain, Tony Lowe, R Addington, HS Wozedge, HH Schoowenburr, M Chamberlain, Diane Griffiths, Mike Hoare, RS Greatrex, HP Paget, Jane Temple, RA Farrand, Keith Halfacree, Henry James Carney, IR & CA Hare, Maurice Jennings, Steve Bell, Nathalie Avery, Fi Forsyth, Barry Sheerman MP, Gary Kent, Patricia Wynn Davies, John Horder, Image Setters, Dr Roger Till, David Brook, Patricia Holland, K Sahinidou, Martin Green, David & Peter Moller, Paul Collet, G A Horton, John Williams, Stuart Hannell, Jo and Jane McCarthy, Adrian Barritt, Richard Ward, Angela Kennedy, Diane Paice, Denise Rhodes, Samantha Whittaker, Sarah Goodall, Derek Jones, Andy lees, Janice Acquah, Sue Crockford, David Ransom, Alison Smith, Olive Gearing, Alexandra Murrell, Chris Hudson, Virginia Gibbons, James Winston, Kevin Halligwin, Clyde Loakes, Claire Whitehead, John Williams, Iain Dale, Mr Madewell, Andrew Guy, Wigston Branch Labour Party, Ann Lawson Lucas, Sue Forrest, Michelle Miles, Chris Price, Martha Ault, Andy Lees, Mark Dixon, Louise Coubrough, Ray Hassell, Pam Burchill, DC Rourke, Ruth Moulton, S McGiffen, Susan Kath, John Burgess, NJ Stephens, Lisa Schulkind, G Flood, Iwao Peter Okuyama, Linda Craig, Graham Turner, Martin T Palmer, William J Moran, DM Reilly, Rachel Reynolds, DHJ Morgan, Kay Butcher, PJ Stewart, L Lancucki, Gina Beck, Tim Minogue, E Fletcher, Dr Jonathan Dare, John E Mitchell & Dina Williams, Derek Enright MP, J Frazer, BJ Corringham, Richard Taylor, FD Sowby, RP Davis, John & Jean Salt, LW Barr, B Seabourne, LM Naughton, M Coombs, Falmouth Labour Party, Hannah Sims, Eileen Moore

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Andrzej Krauze

Cause to reflect

The apalling carnage of the past week in Northern Ireland should make everyone on the left draw breath and reflect. Reflect on the fact that while tens of thousands have demanded constitutional reform in this country in recent years only an infinitesimal minority of British socialists are either involved in addressing, or have shown any interest in acquainting themselves with, the most dramatic constitutional crisis in this state—one in which the latest killings are but the tip of an iceberg of human tragedy.

Reflect on the fact that when John Smith addressed the Labour conference last month, his speech ranged over domestic constitutional change and the conflicts in the middle east, South Africa and ex-Yugoslavia—yet of Northern Ireland, not a word. Reflect, too, that unlike the government and the Liberal Democrat spokesperson, Lord Holme, neither Labour nor its spokesperson, Kevin MacNamara, deigned to join the 554 individuals and groups who made submissions to the unprecedented and comprehensive Opsahl Commission on Northern Ireland.*

Reflect, finally, on the absurdity that, whatever one thinks of the long-term future for Northern Ireland, while anyone can join the Labour Party anywhere else in the world, including the Irish Republic, no one in Northern Ireland can seek to inform the party's thinking on the 25-year-long "troubles".

A University of Ulster academic once argued that Northern Ireland was now largely seen by the British establishment as a matter of foreign policy. Better, though, than being left off the map altogether. For thus, out of sight and out of mind, goes almost remarked awesome, daily paramilitary inhumanity; a government human rights record excoriated year in, year out by Amnesty International; and an extraordinary "democratic deficit" so forcefully brought home to the Opsahl Commissioners—in which no one resident in Northern Ireland has the remotest say over the future of their lives.

This ought to be a cause for every liberal and socialist to grasp. Every ringing slogan about peace, justice and equality, about cultural pluralism, minority rights and participatory democracy—the very lexicon of modern socialism—applies *a fortiori* to the Northern Ireland crisis. Yet, so often, the response of the British left has been a hang-dog defeatism, a head-shaking bemusement at the complexity of it all. And a failure, in the process, to address the key role of the British state, of its human rights depradations—with another army shooting on Tuesday—and its waste-land economics, which have so fuelled the paramilitary politics of despair.

In the absence of more considered thought, the predominant view of the left, if such there clearly be, is not a million miles removed from the "let them fight it out" view typical of the average English nationalist. Whether it be joint authority with Dublin , or more proximate Irish unification, the key *desideratum* is that Britain's responsibility for Northern Ireland should, conveniently, be diminished. The fact that both policies are incompatible with the "consent" requirement for constitutional chanege enshrined in the Anglo-Irish agreement, or that both blithely assume that Dublin is able and willing to take on the security and financial responsilbities of the north, is, presumably, neither here nor there.

Indeed, the dangerous view is maturing that the views of actually-existing people in Northern Ireland—so plurally and movingly presented to the Osahl Commission—are really rather a secondary matter. This has developed *pari passu* with its murderous consequences in Northern Ireland, as increasing insecurity within the Protestant community about Britain's intentions has been reflected in loyalist paramilitaries outdoing republicans in ruthlessness, leaving waste an appalling swathe of Catholic lives. But then they're over there too.

Herbert Asquith once talked wistfully of towing Ireland out into the Atlantic, David Lloyd George of putting up a "fire curtain" in the Irish sea. It was Britain's lack of engagement, rather than imperialist conspiracy, which, by the Westminster convention of non-interference, allowed the Stormont *ancien regime* to fester and spawn the current troubles. It is time for the British left to break with this tradition.

The key is to distinguish two aspects of the conflict, often hopelessly conflated. There are questions of equality and human rights, on which there can be no compromise. There are also, however, issues of national identity on which, as elsewhere in Europe, *only compromise can break the zero-sum game.*

The Opsahl Commission made the best stab in 25 years at such an historic compromise. And a subsequent poll, carried out throughout these islands, found very strong support for its most controversial political proposals—though there was understandable wariness among the region's Protestants. The commission advocated equality, power sharing and legal recognition of Irish nationalism within Northern Ireland—thereby nullifying the minority position of its Catholic population—as well as acceptance that there could be no change in the north's constitutional status without the consent of both communities—thus nullifying the Protestant concern about being a minority in Ireland as a whole. It also advanced a raft of civil libertarian remedies, and measures to address social injustice and cultural intolerance, and to enhance public, especially women's, participation.

It was, in other words, a catalogue of good sense, a beacon of hope in bleak and dark times. The Labour deputy prime minister in Dublin, Dick Spring, has been fulsome in his praise for the commission and its proposals. Lord Holme has also been warm in his support. The Labour Party should now respond too.

** A Citizens' Inquiry: The Opsahl report on Northern Ireland Lilliput Press, £8.99 (distributed in Britain by Central Books)*

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Plaid goes it alone

Since its formation in 1925, Plaid Cymru has steered a somewhat erratic course in its endeavour to move nationalism up Wales' political agenda. The next bend to be negotiated along the winding road appears at the party's annual conference in Cardiff tomorrow (Saturday 29 October) when a proposal to seek republican status for the principality comes up for discussion.

Formulated by Plaid's national executive committee, the lengthy resolution has a fundamentalist ring and calls for independence—not simply a parliament—for Wales, which would retain links with the United Kingdom legislature. At a time when the major parties in Wales are locked in combat over achievable devolution—Labour and the Liberal Democrats demand an elected body to control Welsh affairs while the Tories remain wedded to the *status quo*—the nationalists have opened up a new front. It may even win converts among a frustrated people battered by 14 years of Tory rule.

The nationalists want to see a Welsh House of Representatives of 100 members, elected by proportional representation and with a 50/50 split between men and women, and an upper chamber drawn from local authorities.

Plaid will have to draw on as yet undisclosed political skills to sell the idea to a wider audience. It has an inconsistent track record that smacks of opportunism. Originally set up to safeguard the Welsh language and culture, it still retains a middle-class image. Efforts to sharpen its cutting edge in the late 1970s and early 1980s by establishing a policy described as "community socialism" withered on the vine. The radicals retreated and their standard bearer, Dafydd Elis Thomas, an MP for 19 years until his unexpected elevation to the House of Lords, has quit the field.

Although it described itself as "the party of Wales", Plaid is divided, not least by geography. Its four MPs represent rural Welsh-speaking constituencies. In the densely populated south it commands minimal support; in the 1993 election, nationalist candidates lost their deposits in 23 of Wales' 38 contests. Internal problems have not helped. A shake-up of paid staff earlier this year saw the replacement of the long-serving general secretary by a young Turk, 30-year-old Karl Davies, a one-time chair of the Welsh Language Society.

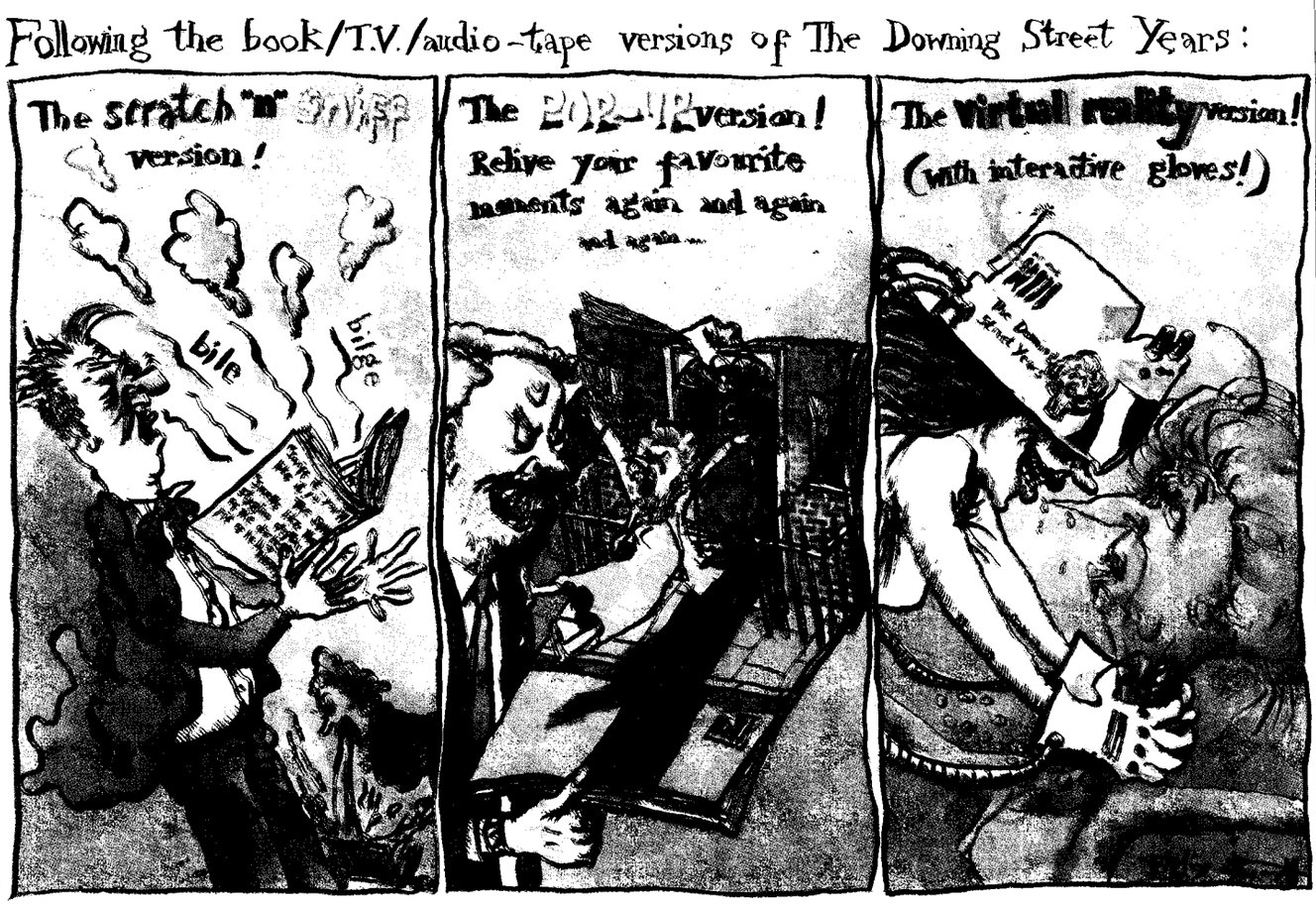
Concentration on constitutional matters and debate over the structure of government in Wales have combined to sideline policy discussion. There is more than a touch of irony about one conference motion which attacks the growth of quangos—Lord Elis Thomas is now a major figure in that cosy coterie, earning £20,000 a year as a part-time chairman of the Welsh Language Board.

Privately, the more pragmatic wing admits that going nap on total separation is like betting on Caernarfon United winning the FA Cup. An elected body with powers to control the £6 billion a year Welsh Office budget and runaway quangos like the discredited Welsh Development Agency, is certainly needed to meet Welsh aspirations. That much is shared across the party divide—with, of course, the exception of the Tories who, despite holding only six of Wales' parliamentary seats, rule unchallenged with the Thatcherite John Redwood at the helm.

Welsh concerns, as elsewhere throughout Britain, are firmly focused on jobs, public services and social policy. Schemes, however carefully crafted, to saw Wales off along Offa's Dyke have little resonance. Plaid's fascination with structure rather than substance has a certain appeal to the chattering classes grouped round the Welsh media. Raise the question in Treorchy or Tredegar, and you get a shrug of indifference.

Earlier this month Plaid hosted a conference of European Free Alliance leaders whose parties have similar separatist tendencies. The stars of the show were the representatives of Italy's Northern League, the party based on affluent Fiat-land, which is less warm towards its poorer compatriots from the south. In its search for votes, Plaid would do well not to follow the same route.

FELIX BENNETT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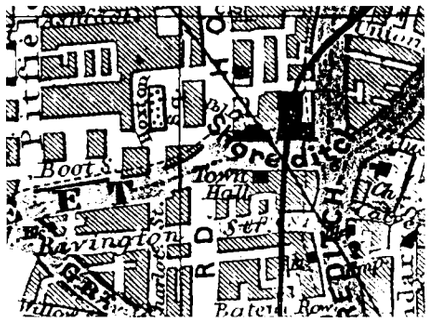

How nice to hear that in these days of permanent recession, one London local authority has nonetheless been giving generously to the needy. Liberal Democrat-controlled Richmond-upon-Thames borough council has sent a cheque for £74,000 to the Twickenham Conservative Association—whose parent company, the Tory Party plc (prop. John Major) is struggling with a £19-million deficit. The politically incorrect donation was uncovered only when curious Twickenham Tories rang the town hall, thus blowing the gaffe on their unexpected windfall. "As soon as we realised the cheque had gone out to them, we had it stopped. The Conservative Association was very honest in telling us straight away," a council spokeswoman tells Shoreditch. "It was an error, and people are being advised that it was extremely foolish and mustn't happen again." No doubt cash-strapped Tory Central Office is advising its Twickenham branch of exactly the same thing.

Moving over from shadowing the Citizen's Charter to shadowing the Heritage ministry would be a delivery from the ridiculous to the sublime for most Labour frontbenchers; but not, perhaps, for Mo Mowlam, who now has that pleasure. While many in the Labour team crave the job—free tickets galore, lots of gallavanting about with the likes of Ken 'n' Em—Mowlam is not known as the most luvvie-enamoured person in the shadow cabinet. A no-nonsense member representing the industrial seat of Redcar, her own *curriculum vitae* lists her extra-parliamentary activities as "jigsaws and swimming". Truly a woman after Shoreditch's own heart, she has only ever been to the opera twice, and on one of those occasions she fell asleep.

There are other farcical aspects to Labour's reshuffle. There was, for instance, a quite extraordinary piece of back-stabbing done by shadow foreign secretary Jack Cunningham on Michael Meacher. Cunningham, whose dismal performance in the past year had made him a favourite to lose his shadow cabinet place, stayed on by just three votes—not least because Meacher, who as overseas development spokesperson had him as his immediate boss, agreed to canvass support for him and persuaded a handful of left-leaning MPs that Cunningham wasn't as bad as all that. Meacher was repaid for his loyalty by being shifted against his will, and at Cunningham's insistence, from the overseas development portfolio to the non-job of shadowing William Waldegrave on the Citizen's Charter.

Another politician dealt a bum hand is Jeff Rooker, one of the brightest and the best of junior frontbenchers, who has been fired as higher education spokesperson for suggesting, in a document hastily withdrawn from publication, a system of student loans. Rooker's boss, Ann Taylor, who has been as ineffectual as Cunningham, kept her job.

Dennis Skinner is piqued by rumours that he helped to scupper the women in the shadow cabinet elections. Far from it, he tells Shoreditch. "I've got mixed up in this because I'm friendly with people in the miners' group and other so-called horny-handed sons of toil who tried to stop the increase. I talk to people like that, but I'm not one of them. They've said to me, 'You're the only one among us who's politically correct.'"

Shoreditch would love to know what the women occupying Parkside colliery might have to say about the behaviour of their representatives in parliament. The women have just scored a notable success in halting the razing of the mine. Lorries arriving with rocks and cement to fill the pit-shaft were forced into retreat after a confrontation with protestors. But at Grimethorpe and Houghton Main in Yorkshire, British Coal's bulldozers are now free to roll in any time after 24 November.

"GOTCHA!" screams the headline, under the picture of a boat disappearing beneath the waves. But the boat is a child's toy made from a newspaper—from the *Daily Mirror* to be precise—and the caption mentions a rather less exotic boat than the *Belgrano*. This time it's the *HMS Mirror* that's sinking "down, down, down". "LATEST SALES FIGURES TORPEDO THE MIRROR", says the *Sun*'s latest proud advertisement. Shoreditch is considering whether to offer itself to the *Sun*'s marketing department. How about a photo of, say, a model of Dresden after weeks of allied bombing? We'd know it was Dresden by the still legible road sign that lies prominently on the rubble. And under the pic, in a nice red colour perhaps, the words: "WE'VE PULVERISED THE OPPOSITION INTO THE DUST"? We're awaiting the call.

More news of Tony Banks, the man we reported as last week cutting a swathe through the nation's literary salons following the publication of his book Out of Order, co-authored with Jo-Ann Goodwin. The Newham North-West MP's second career as a novelist is getting off to a flying start. Century, the publisher of his debut opus, lists the new author in its catalogue as a "rising young star of the Labour Party"—a biography of which Banks would approve, since he is a mere 50 years old.

FOURTH ESTATE

A regular monitor of the tabloid press

23 October: The *Daily Express* finds something to lighten the gloom: the national lottery. "Estimates suggest that about 50 [people] will become millionaires every year. It will greatly add to the gaiety of the nation." Most people might think a wedding would add to the gaiety of the nation, but not it seems when it's paid for out of the council tax. Notwithstanding past furores over unmarried mothers, Leicestershire council's decision to help pay for a reception, rings and a wedding dress for a girl leaving council care comes in for a lot of stick. "Teenage bride gets £1,000 from council", reads the headline in the *Daily Mail*. It was left to the *Daily Star*'s front page to hint at what might be the problem: "Council gives Sikh girl £1,000 to wed". As the *Mail* allows Mike Wells—Leicester's deputy director of social services—to point out, "£74,000 has been spent on 144 youngsters leaving care in the last six months, ranging from direct cash support to buying furniture, meeting the cost of rent and college fees." Still on a spending theme, the *Sun* is confused over the Marks & Spencer opening up one of its shops so Virginia Bottomley can shop in private story: "Why is M & S so nice to the Tories?" asks the *Sun*. Isn't this what is known as a rhetorical question?

24 October: The *People* publishes the "MOST AMAZING SEX SURVEY EVER CONDUCTED IN BRITAIN": 19 per cent of its male, and 12 per cent of its female, readers "never" have sex. The *Mail on Sunday*'s John Junor gives his opinion of Margaret Thatcher: "It is my continuing conviction that she wants to become foreign secretary . . . If the international situation continues to worsen . . . wouldn't the combination of Margaret Thatcher and John Major be an irresistible incentive to deserters to return to the Tory fold at the next election?" Ah, the rhetorical question again. A *News of the World* "Royal Exclusive" reveals that Princess Diana is reconciled to "a much smaller role" and is considering "virtual retirement from public life".

25 October: "Princess Diana has had secret talks with John Major in a bid to become an official British envoy," declares the *Daily Star*. "The Princess is determined not to be squeezed out of Royal duties by stuffy Palace officials." Reading between the lines, it's becoming increasingly clear to Fourth Estate that what Princess Di really wants is a smaller, less onerous, but *more prominent* role.

26 October: The *Sun*'s front-page "Exclusive" rocks the world: "A Marks & Spencer store opened up an hour early so Lady Thatcher could shop in private." The reason? So as not "to inconvenience the public".

27 October: The *Daily Mail* thinks the Canadian elections hold a message for someone: "In the twinkling of an electoral eye, a ruling party becomes an endangered species. One day, they may strut the national stage, the next it can be curtains." Hmm.

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Sean French on bad behaviour, harassment and settling old scores

One day, a social historian will analyse why Britain became obsessed for a couple of weeks with a rape trial involving two students. What might have seemed a routine, obscure case, unpleasant, but of no public interest, became a major story for day after day in the quality press, culminating in huge front-page coverage when the defendant was acquitted.

There have been dozens of sober leading articles and columns pontificating about responsibility in personal relationships and weighty matters of that kind, but the real reason is probably more straightforward. In a documentary made near the end of his life, John Betjeman was asked if he had any regrets about his life: "Yes," he said brightly from his wheelchair, "I haven't had enough sex." I think many older people, though they might be reluctant to admit it, share that sentiment, and hence there is a curious prurient fascination and envy that they feel towards the young. And most young people only escape the influence of their parents fully when they go to university, so the behaviour of students, over-sexed and under-supervised, has become a subject of particular interest.

Some of Philip Larkin's most famous poems feature his sexual envy of the young, and it was clearly a torment for him to work in a university library where he had to fantasise about these fornicating students every day from nine to five. His poem, *Administration*, a work as apparently deeply felt as it is technically incompetent, reveals what was going on behind his thick spectacles: "Day by day your estimation clocks up/Who deserves a smile and who a frown/And girls you have to tell to pull their socks up/Are those whose pants you'd most like to pull down."

Popular fantasies about universities are not entirely without a basis in reality. One of the more amusing passages in Paul Routledge's recent, rather dispiriting, biography of Arthur Scargill (HarperCollins) covers the miners' strike of 1972, which severely weakened, terminally as it turned out, the government of Edward Heath. Scargill and other miners embarked on a highly successful tour of universities, and it wasn't just hearts and minds that they were winning over: "Scargill enthused about audiences packed with students *and* miners. 'The barriers were down,' he proclaimed. And so they were, in more ways than one. The tabloid press finally cottoned on to the fine time the comrades were having. [Lawrence Daly, the General Secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers] rang the campus pickets, and was assured: 'It's OK, Lawrence, we're doing the work—and we're getting our leg over every night.' Daly, no critic of pulchritude, replied: 'I know, and I'm a miner too— but just get your arse out of that university.'" I'm afraid my own experience of industrial warfare was nothing like that.

One of the odder contributions to the resulting debate on sexual behaviour came from Lynn Barber in the *Sunday Times*, in which she was swiping at Paul Johnson for his view, expressed in the *Spectator*, that women actually go up to university wanting a bit of sexual harassment after their years of hard work at school. She agreed that she had gone up to Oxford wanting sex, but only with sensitive men who wouldn't harass her, and she seemed to be denouncing Johnson himself for his unwelcome attentions to her (at a party given by Lord Weidenfeld).

It all depends what you mean by harassment, since harassment is just a word for unwelcome attentions. When it is welcome it stops being called harassment—a distinction that Johnson was mischieviously pretending to ignore, perhaps because he was writing in the *Spectator*, where an appearance of political correctness is something to be cultivated with ostentatious pride.

Barber says she wanted sensitivity, but I remember her profile of the drug-pusher, Howard Marks, whom she had known when they were both Oxford undergraduates. She vividly described his chaotic charm, and how he used just to go up to women and ask them to sleep with him and how many of them, including Barber herself, had cheerfully acquiesced. (If I am ever asked to contribute to one of those magazine features on "Things I wish I'd known at 18", that chat-up line will be it, though I suspect it's all in the delivery. I can't tell jokes either.) Mike Tyson used to employ the Howard Marks technique and it was used as evidence against him when he was convicted for rape, but then Tyson probably lacked the public school charm, the seductive twinkle in the eye, that brought Marks so much. It doesn't matter all that much now, though, since both are in prison and it looks as if Tyson will be out long before Marks.

People constantly try to describe specific acts of behaviour that are offensive, but it's no good. Apparently nasty actions can be highly desirable from the right man or woman, whereas apparently kind or sensitive acts can seem like unwelcome harassment. A woman was recently sued in America for sexual harassment after she had breast-fed her baby in a restaurant. The woman had clearly failed to understand that the function of breasts in a public place is to be displayed on the bodies of apparently underage girls in newspapers and magazines. The suggestion that their function is not sexual stimulation can be disturbing and offensive to young men—a British survey recently found that they were more strongly opposed to breast-feeding in public than any other group.

I'm sure that Barber's views, confused though they may be, are sincerely held, but I suspect that there was also an old score being settled in her attack on Johnson. Several years ago she brought her notorious interviewing tools to bear when she interviewed him on the leader page of the *Sunday Independent*. The normal rules of the interviewing game are that the subject is professionally polite, while the interviewer is sycophantic in person, before getting revenge afterwards with his or her word processor. Johnson broke the rules by suddenly saying to Barber: "You've only read the cuttings, haven't you? You haven't read my books."

Johnson had harshly put his finger on what is wrong with Barber's journalism. She denounces her subjects' shallow preoccupation with fame, yet it frequently seems to be Barber herself who is preoccupied with personality at the expense of the body of work that the subject has produced. After Barber acidly profiled Melvyn Bragg, she was herself the victim of literary revenge when Bragg crudely caricatured her in his next novel. George Orwell identified revenge as one of the main motives for writing but it is pretty demeaning (to Bragg, I mean, not to Barber) when it is as open as that.

Anyway, there are interviewers who have had worse experiences with Paul Johnson than Lynn Barber. Christopher Silvester's imminent *Penguin Book of Interviews: an anthology from 1859 to the present day* (it's actually much more worthwhile than it sounds in prospect) ends amusingly with an interview with Paul Johnson by Richard Stengel that was commissioned by *Time* magazine, though published by *Spy*. Johnson's *History of Modern Times* has become almost a Bible of modern American conservatism, the bedside reading of Richard Nixon and T Danforth Quayle, so Stengel, who had flown to London from America just for the interview, was eager to question him about developments in foreign affairs. Meeting Johnson in his Bayswater house, Stengel switched on his tape recorder and received precisely 14 words in response to his list of prepared questions. They were: "Don't know . . . No . . . Don't know . . . Don't know . . . Very unlikely . . . Unlikely . . . Don't know . . . Don't know . . ."

Johnson then walked out of the room. After ten minutes, Stengel shouted out for him. After 15 minutes, he undertook a tentative search of the house. There was no sign of anybody. After half an hour, he found his coat and left: "I looked back at the house as I walked away. All the lights were out, and I didn't see any movement of the curtains."

If I become famous, I shall save this technique for when Barber interviews me.

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Reading between the lines

Why does John Major see no point in the talks between John Hume and Gerry Adams, which Hume says offer the best hope of peace he has seen in 20 years? After the Shankill slaughter, the rational response to that question is not one of outrage at the IRA, however justified, but to consider what Gerry Adams is really at. That is only possible with detailed analysis. For lack of that, British liberal debate, alas, seems yet again likely to miss the point.

It is fatuous to pretend that, because of the broadcasting ban, we cannot understand Adams' position. His words are now being fully spoken by actors, and he also gives interviews to newspapers. Admittedly, he speaks in a language of deep ambiguity, but that is neither accident, nor failure of education, nor the fault of the actors.

His reaction to Shankill is an example: "What happened, no matter about the intention, cannot be excused. I think that those who are in a position of leadership in the IRA—no matter about the pressures which might be on them from loyalist killer gangs—they have to be aware that how they respond to these pressures could end up as it did yesterday [on Saturday]."

Now Gerry Adams is inhibited—in order to ensure his continued freedom from prosecution—by a legal need not to say anything that admits that the Republican movement is the seamless robe that most informed observers believe it to be, with the political and military wings working in unison. That is one reason for his convoluted prose. But even allowing for that, what on earth do the two "no matter . . ." clauses in that paragraph mean?

The only rational meaning of "no matter about the intention" is that the IRA, and presumably their loyalist equivalents, are quite entitled to shoot and bomb each other on the streets of Belfast, provided they can, miraculously and unbelievably, avoid "civilian" casualties. (Oh, and by the way, RUC men, British squaddies, and workers in firms who have building or other contracts with the above are legitimate targets also.)

And what about the second "No matter . . ."? Here a detailed textual analysis is needed to clarify the prose: "Those who are in a position of leadership in the IRA . . ." *Translation: I have no control over them—QED, for legal reasons.* "No matter about the pressure which might be on them from loyalist killer gangs . . ." *Translation: If they were attacking those gangs, that might be different.* "They have to be aware that how they respond to those pressures could end up as it did . . ." *Translation: This attack went tragically wrong (as the IRA itself had conceded, though in clearer terms).*

Now the purpose of this analysis is to examine the willingness and ability of Adams to deliver peace, if the terms suited him. In later interviews, he said he believed he could do so. (*Interpretation: that is said for political reasons, yet keeps him legally fireproof.*) But would any sane politician, in the aftermath of Shankill, and in the light of his other statement, believe that, and act on it? And what about the terms?

John Hume still does not disclose in public what the terms of his agreement with Gerry Adams are, but angrily demands "a positive response" from the British government, while later declining on television even to define *that* ambiguous phrase. In an interview before the Shankill tragedy, Adams had filled this gap from his point of view, in a way that blew that gaffe: he said the British government must sue for peace—a significant phrase, which, astonishingly, newspaper reports of his interview in *On the Record* failed to underline, although a transcript was circulated to the press.

Adams said the British government must sue for peace—a significant phrase the newspapers failed to underline

Even before Shankill, it is difficult to think how John Hume could have made it more difficult for either the British Government or the Unionists to give "a positive response" to his agreement with Adams. After its existence, but not its content, had been disclosed, he went to the United States and briefed Irish-American leaders. He came back and briefed the Irish government.

Was no one outside the ranks of far-flung Irish nationalism to be trusted, until all inside had been persuaded? John Hume may have concluded that such manoeuvring served him well during the New Ireland Forum and in the run-up to the Anglo-Irish Agreement in the eighties, but it does not look like a serious route to good inter-communal or inter-government relations during the already bloody nineties.

But Irish politicians have no monopoly of ambiguity. The Battle of the Memoirs has disclosed a fascinating example in the same field. Geoffrey Howe still regards the Anglo-Irish agreement as one of the real achievements of his foreign secretaryship. But when he was writing his withering review of Margaret Thatcher's book, did he stop to consider the way in which it was negotiated?

Howe scoffs at her criticism of Michael Heseltine for not accepting cabinet collective responsibility over Westland: "Coming from the past mistress at marginalising cabinet committees . . . this is quite a statement." He confesses that, as chancellor, and to a lesser extent as foreign secretary, he was one who was usually present, but waxes indignant on behalf of his excluded colleagues. Quite right too!

Now jump to the memoirs of his successor as chancellor, Nigel Lawson. He was not invited to cabinet committees on the Anglo-Irish agreement. In fact, he writes that it was negotiated in total secrecy, largely by the cabinet secretary, Robert Armstrong (he of "economic with the truth" fame). The cabinet was presented with a *fait accompli*, with only Margaret Thatcher, Geoffrey Howe, Douglas Hurd, Tom King, and possibly Michael Heseltine in the know in advance. Lawson regarded this agreement as "a political liability", and thinks no objective observer could believe otherwise. Other ministers have said much the same.

Now jump to the Thatcher book. Tom King, she discloses, soon after becoming Northern Ireland secretary, sent her a minute to express his scepticism about whether the government had done a balanced deal with Dublin, though he later "became more enthusiastic". (Wonderful thing, the handbag!)

So who does believe the agreement is a success? What of Margaret Thatcher herself? She sadly concluded: "Greater support by the Nationalist minority in Northern Ireland or the Irish government and people for the fight against terrorism were not going to be forthcoming. Only the international dimension became noticeably easier to deal with . . . It is surely time to consider an alternative approach."

So there you have it: an agreement, which the cabinet did not get a decent chance to consider, put Ulster democratic politics in deep freeze for years, because it alienated the Unionists without impressing the Nationalists. And the only gain was to help Geoffrey Howe keep the Boston Irish off Ronald Reagan's back.

It looks a bit trivial compared with Shankill, especially now that John Hume is off down a new cul-de-sac. For was the Anglo-Irish agreement not intended to help his SDLP defeat Sinn Fein in elections?

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Rocard set up for sure defeat

The two significant achievements of last weekend's French Socialist Party (PS) conference at Le Bourget—the first since the party was routed in the March elections—did little to convince anyone that it can prevent the right capturing the presidency in 1995.

First, Michel Rocard was effectively consecrated as candidate when he was elected first secretary of the party, a move that ratified his seizure of the party apparatus in the aftermath of the March defeat. Second, at Rocard's insistence, the conference ensured that the notion of a four-day week as a strategy for battling unemployment was placed firmly at the centre of the PS campaign.

But the acceptance of a charismatically challenged, 62-year-old candidate belies any appreciation of the desperate situation that the PS, and by implication the whole of the left, finds itself in—even though Rocard's feud with President Francois Mitterrand meant that he was in political exile during the dying days of the PS administration and so can, with some justification, disclaim responsibility for the election debacle.

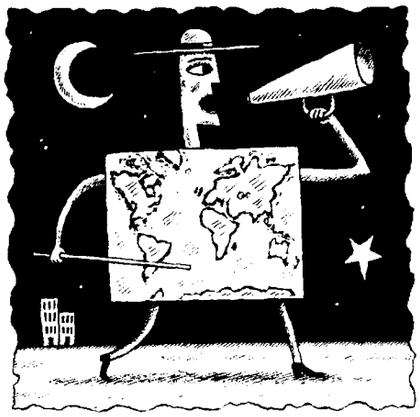
Similarly, the proposal for a four-day week has a distinctly half-baked whiff about it, reflected in the ambivalent response it got even from PS activists. Apart from the thorny question of what to do about wages—barely touched upon far less resolved at the conference—there is little evidence that a cut in working hours will actually lead to an upturn in employment. As the big idea for an election in 18 months time, it smacks of desperately clutching at straws.

The apparently unquestioning acceptance of Rocard's candidacy and agenda was not the only slightly bizarre feature of the conference. For a party that has just concluded a decade of power with an unprecedented electoral rout, it was surprisingly short on self-criticism. The PS seems to think that Edouard Balladur's right-wing government will make such a hash of things that the electorate will turn around and say: "Come back, all is forgiven."

That was the point acidly made by Jean-Pierre Chevenement, the former defence minister who left the PS earlier this year, when he remarked, in a reference to the Air France dispute, "Le Bourget was the only airport where nothing happened this week.

"There was not a trace of self-criticism for past errors. It is precisely because the PS does not want to break from its pro-Maastricht monetarism that it has to come up with magic solutions like the four-day week. It was as if the PS had not been in power from 1981 to 1993."

Chevenement is often described as France's Tony Benn, but the comparison is misleading. Benn was an important figure because he was



at the head of a strong movement that questioned Labour's record in office. Because of the fundamentally electoralist nature of the PS and the absence of any kind of mass base, there is no prospect of the kind of revolt that Labour experienced in the early eighties. The isolated position of Chevenement today only serves to underline that.

The conference was also markedly free of any discussion of Rocard's last big idea, the Big Bang. First touted in the spring as a plan to regenerate the left on the basis of a loosely constructed coalition of socialists, communists, ecologists and human-rights activists, the Big Bang now looks like nothing more than simplistic arithmetic: a narrow majority of the French fall under a broadly left-of-centre umbrella, the task therefore is to bond the constituent parts into an electoral mayonnaise. It was never very realistic. It is true that much of the ecological movement's growth in the past five years stemmed from disillusionment among previous supporters of the PS administration. But a sizeable chunk of that constituency is as comfortable with the pragmatic conservatism of Balladur as with the left.

The Communist Party (PCF) retains a core of support just below 10 per cent, but its remarkable resilience is mainly due to the oppositional role it played while the PS presided over ever-increasing unemployment. Similarly, anyone involved in single-issue campaigns has spent the past decade fighting the Socialists.

A presidential majority for the left won't happen by itself and the likelihood of the current administration making it happen for them was reduced this week with the resolution of the Air France dispute. By backing down over the package of wage and job cuts, Balladur's government gave a clear signal that it was not prepared to usher in a new era of social conflict in the name of deregulation.

The strike effectively marked the end of Balladur's honeymoon in office—and the public's indulgence is sure to be sapped as unemployment continues its relentless rise. Equally, however, few are going to forget so quickly that things were not much different under the Socialists. The right could still fall apart before the presidential election—but you wouldn't want to bet on it.

Angus Mackinnon

40 YEARS AGO

"Society and the homosexual"
31 October 1953

Kingsley Martin responds to E M Forster's pleas for a change in the law to decriminalise homosexuality

My conclusion . . . is that everything possible should be done to minimise the social effect of homosexuality and its incidence in society, and that at present we maximise both. Certainly the segregation of sexes in boarding schools seems designed to increase it; so, most obviously, does making the punishment for inversion a period in prison where, as all jail literature testifies, homosexuality thrives in its most evil and intense form. What we can surely do is recognise that the number of completely incurable homosexuals is small; that we should do our best to keep it as small as possible by a more sensible education system, and by psychological treatment for such homosexuals as might be aided by it; that the laws against soliciting and seducing should be separated in the public mind from the sex of the offender; and that there should be no penalties attached to adult males consorting together who, in private, decide to live a homosexual life. Outside England, this is the usual legal situation in the civilised countries of the west, and homosexuality would, almost certainly, be less frequent and have less evil social consequences if it were the law here too.

Canadian Tories stuffed

A pleasant but somewhat intense middle-aged woman with a Reform Party badge summed it up for 84 per cent of the Canadian electorate on election night: "Two seats! Two! Sixteen per cent of the vote! Wiped out! And they deserved it!"

Prime Minister Kim Campbell's Progressive Conservatives received their come-uppance on Monday in a general election that saw the Liberal Party returned with its largest majority in 40 years, a party committed to Quebec independence sweep French Canada, and a right-wing populist grouping take three-fifths of the seats in western Canada.

Six weeks earlier, it had looked as if Campbell might just pull it off for the hapless Tories. For one fleeting moment, she seemed to have restored the ruling party's belief in itself and persuaded it to walk with her toward the sound of gunfire. But, around the begin-

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ning of October, the patient went into convulsions.

The Bloc Quebecois had already sewn up a majority in French Canada. Now it was the turn of the right-wing populists of the western-based Reform Party, who defied the pundits with a surge of support that left the Tories third in the polls in English Canada. Campbell's determined effort to expunge the memory of the spectacularly unpopular Brian Mulroney fell apart, as voters decided, in the words of one squad of hecklers, "Kim, Kim, Kim, you're just like him."

But no one quite foresaw the scale of the Tory defeat. Two seats held out of 153! (That one of these belongs to her leadership rival Jean Charest must be especially galling to the strong-willed Campbell.) Nor did anyone think that the Liberals would take all but two of the 131 seats in Ontario and the Atlantic provinces.

Topping this up with some Quebec seats and a healthy slice of the west's representation, Jean Chrétien's Liberals now hold 175 of the 295 seats in the House of Commons. The Bloc and "the Reform", as it is called, will vie for the title of official opposition. The left-of-centre New Democrats will have to struggle to be heard: they lost all but nine of their 43 seats and two-thirds of their vote.

The result is paradoxical for the Liberals, and bitterly ironic for the Tories. The Liberals have ruled for 52 of the past 72 years not because they are greatly loved, but because they have been able to broker electoral majorities in English and French Canada—particularly the latter. Now they hold a mere 19 of Quebec's 75 seats, and their vision of a bilingual, bicultural federation has been rejected by those to whom it was addressed—the Quebecois—and by westerners.

As for the Progressive Conservatives, they won two federal elections by knitting together a double majority in the style of the Liberals. Yet Mulroney did this in such a contradictory, not to say opportunistic, fashion that the alliance could not hold. As the results came in on 25 October, pundits offered differing explanations for the Tories' collapse: they failed to give the right anything to get its teeth into; they frightened many with their implied threats to the welfare state, which is close to the core of Canadians' sense of national identity; they failed to deliver the special constitutional status they had promised Quebec. All true, no doubt—but all pointing to the shakiness of the house that Mulroney built.

Meanwhile, the importance of the Bloc Quebecois successes cannot be overstated. As very few of Quebec's non-francophones lent their support to the nationalist party and its charismatic leader Lucien Bouchard, the Bloc's share of the vote among French-speakers must have been about two-thirds.

After a vote on that scale, it is difficult to believe the Quebecois will settle for federalism-as-usual. The Bloc would like to pull Quebec out of the Confederation, eventually and with all due process; the Reform would be content to give them a nudge; and who is going to stop them if that is what they want?

Ben Webb

LETTER FROM BUDAPEST

Last weekend, Hungarians once again marked the anniversary of the outbreak of the 1956 uprising. But not everybody in Hungary is satisfied with the way the events have been officially commemorated since the political changes of 1984-90.

In 1956, László Abod was an active member of the Budapest Cental Workers' Council, which organised a massive and effective month-long general strike following the Soviet intervention on 4 November—a fact often ignored by many accounts that tend to focus on events around prime minister Imre Nagy and on the street fighting. Abod subsequently served four years in prison. At his trial in 1957, he declared that the workers' councils, which had appeared throughout the country, stood for "the defence of socialism, for workers' power and workers' ownership, and for the struggle against reaction".

He is still of the same opinion today. "Nobody wanted to give the factories back [to the capitalists]," he recalls. "They wanted workers' ownership, so that workers could have a genuine say in management."

This type of thinking doesn't go down too well today in Hungary, where privatisation is one of the lynchpins of government policy. And yet the views of Abod were arguably the views of the majority at the time. Writer István Eörsi was active in intellectual circles in 1956. He, too, spent four years in prison. Today he is a supporter of the opposition Free Democrats, a party that strongly advocates free-market developments. Yet he agrees that in 1956 the main political thrust was to create a different, democratic form of socialism. "Nobody wanted to go back to the old, pre-war system," he admits.

Today, politicians prefer to emphasise that 1956 was an uprising for an independent Hungary

The documents and newspaper cuttings of 1956 all confirm this. Yet last weekend's speeches ignored all this, as they did in the three previous years. Today, politicians prefer to emphasise that 1956 was an uprising for an independent Hungary.

"It was a national uprising," says Eörsi, "in that there was one slogan followed by everybody—Russians go home! But some people now, mostly the reactionaries and the people belonging to the governing parties, want to make believe that that was the main, or even the only purpose."

What is true is that the memory of 1956 has become somewhat skewed. One of the world's most significant movements for social ownership *and* grassroots democracy has become almost hidden from history, at least in Hungary itself.

The current political climate is clearly not conducive to unbiased interpretation. But historian György Litván, who heads the Hungarian Academy of Sciences' Institute for the history of the 1956 Revolution, argues there is more to it than that.

"You cannot understand the spirit of today," he says, "if you don't take into account that in 1956 there were other forces and tendencies than the socialist and democratic ones. There were rightist elements, too."

Although there were, he believes, minority tendencies, left-wingers like himself tended to play them down in the post-1956 decades under János Kádár, to counter the prevailing offical propaganda, which painted the uprising as a semi-fascist counter-revolution. Today the more nationalistic 1956 veterans are very vocal in Hungary, and their views dovetail neatly with the general orientation of the centre- right government.

In addition, both Litván and Eörsi stress that during the Kádár years Hungarians enjoyed a standard of living much higher than in most east European countries, and even a degree of intellectual freedom. Nobody wanted to upset the apple-cart by circulating that the Kádár regime was based on the violent suppression of a movement for both socialism and democracy. In short, workers' councils were forgotten.

The disintegration of the embryonic Hungarian new left in the seventies also hindered an appreciation of 1956 as an essentially socialist uprising. "Prague happened in 1968. That was the turning point," says Litván. He believes that the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia, strengthened nationalistic feelings among oppositionists in Hungary at the expense of alternative theories of socialism.

In Hungary today, public interest in 1956 is low and mainly confined to bickering among veterans of differing persuasion. Opinion surveys among young people conducted by Litván's institute reveal a basic ignorance as to the events themselves, a situation he and his colleagues are trying to tackle through publications and lectures.

As to the real message of 1956 for today, Litván is rather wary. He believes that, as well as being for national identity, it *was* a collectivist movement, focussed on direct, grassroots democracy, against the privatisation of land and factories and against individualism—all of which is rather out of tune in contemporary Hungary. What is relevant, he believes, is that essentially, and particuarly outside the "rather hysterical atmosphere" of Budapest, it was a "tolerant movement, which accepted all democratic attitudes".

Former activist Abod, however, doggedly maintains that the central message is still workers' power and democratic socialism, while acknowledging, honestly and somewhat sadly: "It's not popular to say so today."

Bob Dent

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Labour men have hung on to their assisted-places scheme, betraying their lack of awareness of life outside Westminster's male club, says **Sarah Baxter**

A boys' own story

You would have thought Labour men would be feeling a little sheepish, perhaps even contrite, about their treatment of women in the shadow cabinet elections. Are they hell! They have been killing themselves laughing ever since the results came in. Reputable members of the shadow cabinet have been joking about how they only voted for themselves and four no-hope women, "Only kidding, ha! ha! ha!".

Everyone has been sniggering about Mildred Gordon, and how she deluded herself into thinking the men voted for her because of her record in fighting racism. Have you heard the one about members of the lobby ringing her up to ask her what job she wanted? The old dear said "Education", ha! ha! ha!

It is all great fun, unless you happen to be a woman and the joke is at your expense. Nobody has apologised for the events of last week. Nobody has said the game got out of hand. Nobody has said sorry, because they're not. In the eyes of Labour men, women do not count.

The men have their excuses, of course. They are against positive discrimination, they say high-mindedly. Or the system itself was to blame. It would have been better to have four reserved places for women (and, by implication, 14 reserved places for men). Don't get them wrong. They have nothing against women *per se*.

Do not believe it. The truth is that the men

have never been reconciled to positive action for women. They have completely erased from their minds the reason why Neil Kinnock introduced the quota system in the first place in 1989.

There was only one woman in the shadow cabinet then, Jo Richardson. As women's minister, she had no one in the government to shadow and was considered a nuisance by men who did not want her to interfere in their departments. Although everyone used to say they "loved Jo", she was disaparaged as "the shopper's friend" after being squeezed more and more into a consumer affairs role.

It was an intolerable state of affairs for a modern party. Thus, the new rule forcing Labour MPs to vote for a minimum of three women was introduced. At the same time, the number of seats in the shadow cabinet was increased from 15 to 18. If the women's gains were going to be at the men's expense, you could forget it! But, this way, the men managed to retain their "assisted places".

The men still considered themselves to be hard done by. They had friends who they believed deserved promotion to the shadow cabinet, yet never quite made it. To them, it was obvious that the women, with their special leg-up, were the obstacle, rather than the re-election, year-in, year-out, of a number of talentless men.

This year, however, the new rule obliging MPs to vote for a minimum of four women was not accompanied by an expansion of the shadow cabinet. Any increase in the number of women threatened men directly. It was feared the women might win six or seven

Nobody has said the game got out of hand. Nobody has said sorry, because they're not

Clockwise from top: out: Harriet Harman and Ann Clwyd; nearly in: Gwyneth Dunwoody; against: John Spellar

seats. It was, as the men said, a "skirt too far". Their self-preservation instincts took over.

What happened is now well-known. Men rushed to dump their votes on women with no chance of winning, notably Irene Adams, Mildred Gordon and Gwyneth Dunwoody. They each chalked up over 80 votes, winning the support of nearly one in three Labour MPs (only a few of whom would have been genuine admirers). That is the measure of Labour's misogynist tendency.

One new woman got elected: Joan Lestor, an opponent of the quota, who had the grace to admit that she was "surprised" by her victory. But the men had already calculated that she was likely to get her old job back as shadow minister for children and the family. No man was going to be deprived of his portfolio in order to make room for her.

Harriet Harman was the main target of the men's animosity. As a southern, middle-class, feminist "moderniser", she represented everything they hated. She was also made to carry the can for Gordon Brown's economic policy.

Ann Clwyd was also defeated. Like Harman, she is considered too much of a feminist. Some of her support on the left also dwindled because of her pro-Maastricht views, and old allies complacently assumed that she did not need their help.

As everyone agrees, the new man in the shadow cabinet, former Europe spokesperson

George Robertson, deserved his success. But he was never expected to win. His friends used to sigh that any new places were bound to go to women. So they helped him along. A good many of Irene Adams' votes will have come from Robertson's friends in the 49-strong Scottish group.

Was there a plot? The even distribution of votes among no-hope women candidates certainly suggests malice aforethought. The party conference in Brighton is thought to be the place where a lot of caucusing was done. But it will not have taken much organisation to persuade men that the best way to keep women off the shadow cabinet was to waste their votes.

It is a matter of record that 31 Labour MPs voted last summer against extending the

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women's quota. They were led by John Spellar, who said frankly at the time, "I'm for open elections, not positive discrimination." Initially, his faction was defeated. But the change in the women's quota was bound up in a series of reforms to the Parliamentary Labour Party. When the whole package was put to the PLP, there was an ambush. The women's quota and the rest of the reforms went down by 50-43 votes (after protests, John Smith intervened to make sure the quota came back as a separate item on the agenda and was finally passed).

John Spellar is a whip, and the whip's office is known to be hostile to some of the PLP reforms. Don Dixon, the little-known MP for Jarrow, is perhaps the most admired and feared Labour whip, and a force to be reckoned with in the Northern Group of MPs. He opposed some of the reforms to the whip's office that were up for discussion at the same time as the women's quota. This accounts for the rumour that the whips, with their fearsome organising skills, were responsible for last week's debacle.

Nothing has been proved against them. But to the 31 who were openly hostile to reform can be added those who wanted to protect their own position on the shadow cabinet (by not voting for rivals); those who hoped to get on (by keeping others off); all the friends of the above; and those who preferred to snub women in a secret ballot, rather than by a show of hands at a PLP meeting. It is not too difficult to reach a figure of 60-70 vote-dumpers that way.

There was also a sustained media attack this summer on the quality of the existing women in the shadow cabinet. There was scarcely a newspaper in the country that did not write them off. Many of them, including the *Guardian*, employed women for the task. I, too, was asked by a national newspaper to rubbish positive discrimination.

It is of course possible that some journalists thought up their articles all by themselves. I like to think that Edward Pearce, who wrote in the *NSS* (13 August) that the new quota was "a piece of stupid authoritarianism . . . given the visible inadequacy of most of the women on Labour's front bench," belongs to this category.

But other journalists have admitted that some Labour men were "less than helpful" to their women colleagues. At Labour's Welsh conference last weekend, Ann Clwyd angrily attacked the "lazy and overpaid" lobby correspondents who merely repeated the latest tittle-tattle "without bothering to analyse the work we have been doing".

At one stage, Harriet Harman, Margaret Beckett, Ann Taylor and Mo Mowlam discussed getting in the gutter and fighting back. But letters and articles in praise of themselves would have looked very silly, and they were not prepared to defend themselves by slagging off the men.

All the same, the idea that they were worse at their jobs than the men was frankly insulting. Men whom the public has never heard of have been re-elected to the shadow cabinet with more votes than ever. The big regional groups, in particular the Scottish and the Northern group, ensured that their boys got back on (and helped Ann Taylor and Mo Mowlam to survive the backlash). There was a big push for Robertson to be elected so that he could replace the much-criticised Tom Clarke as shadow Scottish secretary. So what happened? Robertson got his job all right, but Clarke still kept his seat.

The men now say it is up to the women to organise themselves properly. The argument runs that they were greedy for power and over-reached themselves by standing for election in such large numbers.

Some of the women have fallen for this line. After all, 15 out of 37 women stood. If fewer had put themselves forward, more would have been elected from the cluster of women who very nearly made it (Joyce Quin and Clare Short as well as Harman and Clwyd).

But anti-quota women, such as Llin Golding and Gwyneth Dunwoody, would have stood regardless. Mildred Gordon is also a law unto herself. So all the pressure will be on women such as Joan Ruddock and Kate Hoey not to stand in future. But that will deprive them of the same rights as front-bench men, such as Alun Michael and Graham Allen, to seek promotion and put down a marker for the future. And who will decide whether women like them should make way for contemporaries like Dawn Primarolo or Quin? In any case, if the men stopped to think, they would realise there was something sinister in the argument that women were "asking for" the massive snub they received.

But, of course, the men are not going to blame themselves for what happened. In fact, they have found a new excuse for griping about the women and continuing their vendetta. They claim to be enraged by the way John Smith ignored their votes anyway by reappointing Harman as treasury spokesperson. Many progressive men have joined in the criticism: "It's OLAV—one leader, all votes," says Tony Benn.

But Smith's fear was that an "irresponsible" PLP would start picking off people they disliked one by one. This year, Harriet Harman, next year, another moderniser. He also needed to demonstrate straightaway, as part of a damage-limitation exercise, that he had no truck with sexism. He, at any rate, has not forgotten about the "gender gap", which meant that 5 per cent more women than men voted Tory at the last election.

Harman is now in a very difficult position. She has been brave to stay on and face down the criticism of her grasp of economics. But, next year, the men are vowing revenge. They also scent blood over all-women shortlists; and the increase to two in the number of reserved places for women on the national executive. Women MPs say they are already "sweating" about this.

The men's conduct betrays their lack of interest in the world outside Westminster. The need for attracting new voters has been all but forgotten in an orgy of sexism. It is all very well to sneer at southern, middle-class women, but how many northern, working-class women MPs are there in the Labour Party? In Scotland, there are just two women MPs in all.

The men think they have struck a blow against trendy political correctness, but it was women that they slapped in the face. Women voters will have the last laugh.

INFLUENCES

ROGER GRAEF
Writer and film-maker

What books and authors have had the greatest influence on your political beliefs?
Tom Paine; J S Mill; Thoreau's *Walden*; Camus; Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*; Schumacher's *Small Is Beautiful*; de Gaulle's *The Edge of the Sword*; de Tocqueville on America; I F Stone; H L A Hart on the debates on justice and morality.

Name one film, book, play, poem, and song or piece of music that you would most like everyone to see, read or hear.
Film: *Yol* directed by Guney.
Book: *The Fatal Shore* by Robert Hughes.
Play: Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh*.
Poem: Dylan Thomas' "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night".
Song: Billie Holiday singing "Strange Fruit".

In the early stages of your life, which figures stand out as an important influence on you?
My parents were strong negative influences; my aunt and grandmother, and Judy Higgins, who looked after my brother and me in our early years, were positive ones.

What event during your lifetime has had the greatest effect on your political beliefs?
Harold Wilson's victory in 1964 defending multi-racialism, followed six months later by George Brown's restriction on Commonwealth immigration; Jim Callaghan's "Crisis, what crisis?" in 1979, followed by the Thatcher victory; the election of Michael Foot as Labour leader, and the split that led to the SDP. But most important, the lesson from my great-uncle, a professor of law, that law and justice have little to do with one another.

Which political figure do you most admire?
Andre Sakharov, Abraham Lincoln, Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela.

If you could visit any time in history for 24 hours, which would you choose?
An impossible question, but the liberation of Paris in 1944 must have been great fun.

What do you consider the greatest threat at present to individual freedom and liberty?
The lack of a constitution and Bill of Rights. Without it the government—and judiciary—confuses the interests of the state and the public with party political interest.

On important matters, whose opinion—other than your own—do you trust most?
That of my wife Susan Richards, and my daughter Chloe.

Who is the greatest prime minister we never had?
As an American, I bemoan the loss of William O Douglas, the Supreme Court Justice who was to be Roosevelt's running mate in 1944, and would have become president when he died. Roosevelt worried that he could not carry the south, and so picked Harry Truman.

If you could pass one law, what would it be?
A Bill of Rights, which includes freedom of information and eliminates the government's exemption from liability.

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A washing of hands in Cambodia

When the United Nations leaves Cambodia in the next two weeks, it will dismantle the only national organisation clearing landmines. Training of Cambodians to clear mines has already stopped and vital equipment has been removed, leaving people isolated in minefields without radios to call for help if there is an accident. "Everything has been clawed back", said a voluntary aid worker, "with the exception of a few mine detectors. Even vehicles are now being recalled. One of them had to be almost stolen back so that work could go on. There are no UN supervisors left and there is no money. Cambodia will now be de-mined one limb at a time."

Next to the return of the Khmer Rouge, landmines remain the greatest obstacle to normality in Cambodia. They float like plastic grapefruit in the paddies; they lie one on top of the other near schools and villages. There may be as many as ten million mines, or one for every man, woman and child. Nowhere in the world is there a higher percentage of disabled people, most of them amputees who have stepped on mines. Doctors and paramedics perform up to 500 amputations every month; and for every victim who reaches an ill-equipped hospital, another will die without treatment.

David Munro's photograph on the cover of this issue tells a typical story. The young woman is 23-year-old Rong. We found her in the hospital at Kompong Speu with her three-year-old infant beside her. She had stepped on a mine while working in a paddy and had lain three hours in the water, bleeding, the child clinging to her back. She was lucky; her father happened to be passing and applied a tourniquet. But it was seven hours before she arrived at the hospital after a journey by motorcycle and bicycle over terrible roads—roads untouched by UN development funds promised long ago as essential to the "peace process". Had she got to hospital an hour or two earlier, her leg might have been saved. "I knew there were mines around me," she said. "Every day I was in fear of them. But work had to be done. We must eat, and live."

When the 1991 UN peace accords for Cambodia were drawn up, the issue of mine clearance was given priority. "The laying of mines in Cambodia", said Colonel Alan Beaver, the first UN officer in charge of mine clearance, "is one of the worst modern, man-made environmental disasters of the century." The accords spelt out the UN's responsibility to "assist with mine clearing" (Annex 1, Section C) but this was soon "reinterpreted", according to one UN official, when it became obvious that the UN's single aim was to hold elections, to return Prince Sihanouk to his throne and to get out. "We have no mandate to clear mines", became the apologetic received truth in the UN bureaucracy in Phnom Penh.

This shocked many of the soldiers who were sent, they thought, to clear mines. One of them, Joost Van Den Nouwland of the Dutch army, told me last year that he and his men had been prevented from clearing a single mine in Battambang province. "We came here with all the equipment and knowing the job," he said, "but apart from destroying a few storehouses, we've not been allowed to do anything. It's incredible."

After 18 months of pressure, the UN finally agreed to set up a Cambodian Mines Action Centre, or CMAC, with a remit to train Cambodian mine clearers and to promote "mines awareness" in the population. With a budget of less than £7 million, this Cinderella body gained a reputation based on the well-meaning, often dedicated work of its foreign officers and the courage of the Cambodians they trained. This was the only agency in Cambodia that coordinated mine clearance, and the only source for locating most of the minefields. CMAC people will admit that there are probably more mines now than when they began; but their efforts represented a beginning and were in striking contrast to the cynicism, corruption and ineptitute of so much of the UN operation.

Unless the UN Security Council passes an emergency motion, they won't be clearing any mines after next Monday. Last week the Cambodian director of CMAC, Ieng Mouly, announced "with deep regret" that all mine clearance would cease on 1 November when CMAC would be terminated "at a time when its survival is essential to Cambodia's own survival". CMAC's remaining UN trainers have long been aware of the UN's intention "to pull the plug on mine clearing and quietly slip away". They are not letting this happen. Officers are prepared to mutiny, one of them with the backing of his government. They say that, with the end of CMAC, mine clearance will be left to Cambodians still two years away from qualifying as supervisors. "The main point is that they are not ready," said a voluntary worker with the Indochina Project in Phnom Penh, "and this will lead inevitably to deaths in the field. And without CMAC, there won't be compensation; people won't be paid; and we'll be back to where we came in." (Mine clearance will not end altogether. There are several small private groups operating in Cambodia, notably Britain's Mines Advisory Group).

The day after CMAC announced its closure, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution calling for an end to the "worldwide scourge" of landmines. "Of all the tasks involved in setting a nation on a new road to peace and prosperity," declared Secretary General Boutros-Ghali, "perhaps none has the immediate urgency of mine clearance." The resolution was based largely on evidence from Cambodia that mines killed more peple than any other weapon. It was "imperative", said Boutros-Ghali, "that mine clearing should continue in Cambodia after the UN left".

"The hypocrisy is breathtaking," said Robert Muller, executive director of the Washington-based Indochina Project, which fits artificial limbs to 150 Cambodians every month. "But this is just another example of the way the UN has really operated in Cambodia, in contrast to the propaganda version."

The hypocrisy has a British source. The UN resolution was proposed by the European Community, of which Britain is a principal voice in the UN. In private, the British have told the Clinton administration that they will vigorously oppose any worldwide ban on landmines, regardless of a law that is about to pass through Congress banning the export of American mines for three years. Indeed, so adamant are the British that the Americans are said to be having second thoughts. According to a State Department source: "The British position is commercial. They have a big deal coming up, selling landmines to a Middle East country. There's a lot of money involved."

Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd, who has played arms salesman on a number of occasions, notably to Iraq (1981) and Kuwait (1991) is strongly opposed to the UN and American bans. The British attitude was vividly expressed at a conference on mines last month in Asheville, North Carolina, organised by the American Defence Preparedness Association. Colonel Alisdair Wilson of the Ministry of Defence was a key speaker. "Many pressure groups", he said, "are getting after us to ban the (mines) and are saying, 'Aren't we awful for leaving them all over the world?'... Mines are operationally extremely effective. They kill armour, they're cheap to employ, they're cost effective overall, they save men (soldiers) and politically they can be seen to be defensive."

Colonel Wilson went on to laud "MINX", the acronym for Mines in the New Century which he described as "the basis for our mines stragegy". This "major development" will mean that, after 2001, "scatterable mine systems" will be on the open market. It becomes easier to understand why the British government, notably Douglas Hurd, went to such lengths to deny that the SAS trained the Khmer Rouge coalition in mine laying and

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mines technology between 1983-1991.

The mines issue casts quite a different light on the current promotion of the UN operation in Cambodia as "the most successful in peacekeeping history". A few weeks ago, the UN force commander in Cambodia, Lieut-General John Sanderson, returned home to Australia to a "heroes' parade" and a eulogising press. According to one report, it was Sanderson who "outsmarted the murderous Khmer Rouge": so much so that Cambodian small boys are renaming themselves "Sanderson". Last October, I asked Sanderson why the UN had cleared so few mines. He disputed this and said: "Very soon, we'll make an international appeal to fund this activity. This appeal has to be launched on the basis of a properly launched corporate plan." I asked if this meant that clearing Cambodia's mines had to have a bottom line, that is, to make a profit. "Sure," he replied, "the fact of the matter is that people don't do this for fun." I suggested that Cambodia surely deserved more than a corporate plan to make the country secure. He said, "You've got to understand this is a Cambodian problem."

This view, commonly held in the UN, ignores the fact that no country has been as brutalised by foreigners as Cambodia. In the early 1970s, for example, the US spent hundreds of thousands of dollars killing hundreds of thousands of people with bombs whose tonnage was the equivalent of 120 Hiroshimas. A fraction of this lethal expenditure would clear Cambodia's mines. This was done in Kuwait, but of course Kuwait has money and oil. The week after General Sanderson flew home to his parade, the UN's only mine-clearing operation was pronounced dead. As he would say, it is now "a Cambodian problem".

As for the UN "outsmarting the Khmer Rouge", such a statement is regarded as a black joke by those middle-ranking UN officers who feel strongly that they owe Cambodia more than their promotions. General Sanderson is remembered as one of the principal appeasers of the Khmer Rouge, a central figure in the botched accommodation of a criminal group responsible for the genocide of more than a million Cambodians. When I interviewed him, Sanderson refused to acknowledge the word "genocide", saying that he was "neutral". He may have even believed he was neutral: in fact, he allowed the Khmer Rouge to establish and consolidate their own zones, to refuse entry to UN inspectors and, on one humiliating occasion, to himself. Thus, Pol Pot was able to build on the legitimacy given him by the Paris accords and to establish the supply lines to Thailand and his grip on the gem trade that has made him the richest terrorist in history. As Sanderson's own military situation maps show (see *NSS*, 9 July), Pol Pot's areas of operation actually quadrupled while the general was outsmarting him.

This was suppressed by the UN's very effective propaganda departments and their tribunes in the media. Lately, a long-running nonsense claiming that the UN has "isolated" the Khmer Rouge has gained new life with the "news" that up to "a fifth of the Khmer Rouge army" has defected to the new coalition government. They are, it is said, "hungry, weak and demoralised".

As an exercise in disinformation this echoes previous "defection" stories promoted by Sanderson. On close inspection, most of the current "defectors" are young teenagers only recently press-ganged by the Khmer Rouge—who recruit as many as 400 of these boys in one day, and clearly expect to lose a proportion of them. Their ideological troops remain intact. A Khmer-speaking State Department official who de-briefed the defectors dismissed most of them as also-rans.

UN figures of Khmer Rouge strength are instructive. In 1991, it was 30,000, which "proved" that the Khmer Rouge were too strong to leave out of the "peace process". Within months, this had halved to 15,000. Today it is 8,000—which means that 22,000 guerrillas have evaporated.

Similarly, the Khmer Rouge were said to have suffered a "major defeat" recently in the north west against the new national army. British researcher Helen Long was the first westerner to arrive at the scene of the "battle" and found the Khmer Rouge had melted away, and that all the "prisoners" were civilians. "I met Khmer Rouge officers in Kompong Thom," she said, "who were fit and in high spirits. They are waiting for the UN to go; they know time is on their side. It's funny but the UN officers I met denied the Khmer Rouge were there at all. As they never went out at night, of course they wouldn't know. In Phnom Penh the Khmer Rouge have infiltrated the coalition government's administrative structure, even the national assembly. Their agents are everywhere."

"Everything has been clawed back, apart from a few mine detectors. Cambodia will now be de-mined a limb at a time"

The Khmer Rouge tactic of infiltration—a tactic used to bring them to power in the 1970s—has been demonstrated by the research of foreign specialists, like Raoul Jennar, Ben Kiernan and Craig Etcheson; but their views are unwelcome in much of the mainstream press, especially in the US, where the simplistic "good news" of a western triumph in Indochina is long overdue. An amusing example of this was a recent piece by William Shawcross in the *New York Times*. "And what of the Khmer Rouge?" he asked. "They are weaker than ever. For them, the election was like holding a Crucifix to Dracula".

The Crucifix and Dracula fable is the one a number of UN careerists will take with them as they fly off to new contracts, promotions and doctorates, having treated Cambodia like a laboratory for foreign ideas and earned the unspoken contempt of many Cambodians they are leaving behind. One UN spokesman, having done such a good job with the foreign media in Phnom Penh, has applied for the UN job in Somalia.

One of the more successful and damaging propaganda stories was the "discovery" of a handful of demobilised Vietnamese soldiers, including a fisherman and man married to a Cambodian. This story was given to the press, suggesting that Vietnamese troops remained in Cambodia: a long-discredited claim by the Khmer Rouge. At the same time, a UN investigation into a crucial alliance of the Thais with Pol Pot was conducted in secret. The report, which carefully documented the presence of Thai troops in Khmer Rouge zones, and Thai deliveries of weapons to the Khmer Rouge, was suppressed.

The UN's undoubted achievement was the work of its electoral volunteers; and the spectacle of the Cambodian people voting was moving. But the "democracy" this represented was undermined long before people went to the polls by the advantage the western powers gave, via the UN circus, to the Khmer Rouge. During the pomp last month that saw Norodom Sihanouk crowned king, little was said about the ethnocentric, secretive regime over which he now holds sweeping powers—just as he did in the 1960s when his dictatorial ways led to the rise of the Khmer Rouge. Since then, he has had a relationship with the Khmer Rouge, described by a British friend as that of "a rabbit with a snake". This is why the Khmer Rouge supported the royalists during the election, demanding that Sihanouk be given "full power as the king". Only Sihanouk, they said, would enjoy the support of Pol Pot's "military might": and only he could resolve the issue of "national reconciliation". By that, they meant a subversive foothold in the regime. Two weeks ago, Sihanouk announced an "advisory role" for the Khmer Rouge in the new government. The Khmer Rouge have demanded a role for themselves in the army.

Anything is possible now that the greatest obstacles to Pol Pot's return have been swept away. Indeed, wrote Craig Etcheson in the *Phnom Penh Post*, "Pol Pot is better positioned today for a return to power than at any time since 1979. The Vietnamese are gone. The "puppet regime" is defeated, replaced by an unstable conglomeration. Pol Pot still has his army and still has highly placed friends in China and Thailand. He is wealthy. He has hugely expanded his territory and population. He has deeply infiltrated the opposing parties, and once again he has both overt and convert operatives in Phnom Penh. And he has convinced most of the world that the Khmer Rouge threat is no more. Nearly 3,000 years ago, the Chinese General Sun Tzu wrote in his classic trentise, *The Art of War*: "All warfare is based on deception . . . He who lacks foresight and underestimates his enemy will surely be captured by him."

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Returned Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto has one last chance to stabilise Pakistan's democracy, writes **Praful Bidwai**

Betting on Bhutto

Sportsphoto

Defying heavy odds, Benazir Bhutto has returned as Pakistan's prime minister. She polled only the second-largest share of the vote in the recent elections, but succeeded in enlisting the support of an impressive 121 members of the 217-strong National Assembly—including 35 from outside her own Pakistan People's Party—against 72 who backed her principal opponent, Nawaz Sharif.

Ironically, in her victory and tactical successes lie the seeds of possible threats to her government and to democratic stabilisation in Pakistan.

To start with, however, Bhutto is over the biggest hump—in Punjab, where the PPP was able to stitch together a bare majority in the provincial assembly with the help of a Muslim League faction and assorted independents. This is no mean achievement. Had Sharif managed to split the coalition—and his chances were rated fairly high—he could have precipitated a serious crisis.

Punjab, home to 60 per cent of Pakistan's population and with a clear majority of seats in the National Assembly, sits heavy on the country. Whoever rules Punjab tends to hold the key to power in Pakistan. The Punjabis certainly exercise an effective veto over policy. A hostile regime in Punjab, as Bhutto discovered in 1988, can be the biggest source of embarrassment and instability to the federal government.

Bhutto's lucky run has continued into Baluchistan, as well as her native Sind, where the PPP has been able to form a government. Only in the Northwest Frontier province has Nawaz Sharif succeeded in building a successful coalition.

Despite this success in Islamabad and three out of four provinces, Bhutto is by no means stable and secure. A good deal of the success is attributable to her temporary and potentially unreliable allies and to divisions in the opposition. The PPP itself won fewer votes than Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League—38.4 per cent as against the PML's 39.8. In Punjab, the respective shares of the two were 30 per cent and 45 per cent. In a situation of turmoil, Bhutto would be vulnerable to defections, just as she has gained from them so far.

There are too many sources of discontent and disaffection in volatile Pakistan to permit Bhutto an easy time in government. Pakistan remains a deeply divided society marked by numerous kinds of ethnic imbalances, unredressed economic and social disparities, problems of debt-driven, uneven growth, a bloated military-bureaucratic establishment, an active politicised clergy, inadequate institutionalisation of democracy, and a problematic relationship with India.

The past few years, in particular the recent elections, have opened up possibilities of breaking the state of seige imposed on Pakistani society by long periods of conservative, military-dominated rule—a total of 26 out of 46 years of independence.

This siege has four components: an obsessive search for national identity, itself tied up with religion; continued pressure from political (if not quite fundamentalist) Islam; a profoundly hierarchical culture that denies equality of rights and status in various ways; and the presence of the military as a major centre of power that inhibits full civilian rule, and does not accept its authority.

All four of these elements tended to feed on and reinforce one another. Under Zia, oppressive military rule was used to impose Islam; martial law itself needed to get legitimacy through religion. Militarisation could be most effectively sustained by invoking and exaggerating the Indian threat. And a range of authoritarian arguments could be derived both from that threat and from religion, to justify hierarchical despotism in politics, society and everyday life. Civil society has always been the victim of this, freedom, creativity and truth being the worst of the many casualties.

This has changed over the past few years. After Zia's death, the army went back to where it belongs, the barracks. However, it remains a major behind-the-scenes player. It has been loath to accept civilian control and grant to the prime minister the power to nominate the army chief.

The army has not intervened openly in recent political disputes. In fact, it delivered a rebuff to President Gulam Ishaq Khan when he tried to draft it into his war against Nawaz Sharif in May. And it probably has no choice but to accept that democratisation may have become irreversible. It knows that nothing else is politically sustainable, internally or externally. It is expected discreetly to nominate its candidate in the 13 November presidential elections. But its influence is now in decline.

Similarly, the influence of political Islam has decreased a great deal. This was revealed dramatically in the election results, when the so-called "third force" of Islamic parties won a miserable six National Assembly seats and polled 3 per cent of the vote.

Bhutto, then, has an historic opportunity to complete the process of lifting the siege, by demilitarising Pakistani politics, extending and institutionalising democracy, and preparing the country for a major thrust as a middle-sized economic power into the 21st century.

Bhutto's ability to do this will depend critically on four factors: repealing the eighth

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amendment to the constitution that gives the president draconian powers; giving the PPP a stable popular base in all the provinces; redistributing power among the regions and ethnic groups more evenly; and defusing tensions and normalising relations with India so that Pakistan can cut its military expenditure (currently running at more than 7 per cent of the GDP) and reallocate it to development.

Bhutto does not seem particularly well-placed to undertake any of these tasks. Earlier this year she reneged on her promise to repeal the eighth amendment by refusing to join hands with Sharif.

The amendment, incorporated in the constitution in 1985, gives the president—by no means a ceremonial entity, and always the army's nominee in Pakistan—drastic powers to dismiss elected governments, dissolve legislatures and impose emergency rule. Its very purpose was to retain the army's pre-eminence even while undertaking half-hearted democratisation.

It has been used three times—in 1988, in 1990 and in April this year—to sack elected civilian governments, on the second occasion, Bhutto's own. And yet Bhutto refused to protest against its patently unconstitutional use against Sharif. Indeed, she was so worried at the prospect of a hostile Sharif, unrestrained by a now-friendly Ghulam Ishaq Khan, victimising and persecuting her, that she chose to join hands with the wily president at the cost of inviting charges of collusion with anti-democratic forces. It seems unlikely that she will take a boldly different stand now.

Bhutto seems loath to launch programmes that could break the hold of Pakistan's landed aristocracy—among the most rapacious in south Asia, thanks to the absence of land reforms under successive governments—and deepen her support among plebeian layers of the population, traditionally the PPP's main constituency. In fact, as we saw in the last election, Bhutto relied more heavily than ever on the support of the big landlords, rural notables and tribal chieftains.

In a complete break with the PPP's origins, Benazir Bhutto actively courted these entrenched interests, systematically promoted in the Zia period as bulwarks against popular anti-martial law forces, and themselves major beneficiaries of the depoliticisation of Pakistani society.

The result has been a dramatic shrinking of the PPP's urban working-class and middle-class base. Sharif, a creature of the military-bureaucratic complex, has emerged as a popular leader in his own right and acquired a more modern image than Bhutto. For all her talk of women's rights, and her feminist image, Bhutto put up no more than four women candidates out of a total of 166—fewer indeed than the PML.

Bhutto will probably be reluctant to undertake a re-ordering of ethnic relations. She is obviously pleased with her surprisingly good performance in Punjab and the Northwest Frontier province, but for that reason is unlikely to take measures that disturb existing arrangements, in particular the over-representation of the two provinces in the military and the bureaucracy.

In Sind, where the PML has done remarkably well, partly because of its alliance with the Mohajirs (Urdu-speaking refugees from north India), the PPP stands badly isolated from the dominant group in the urban population. Bhutto is unlikely to be able to summon up the courage to formulate the right ethnic policies.

On relations with India too, Bhutto would seem, despite intentions, to have limited room for manoeuvre. She was sworn in at a particularly unfortunate hour: amid the Hazratbal crisis in Srinagar and growing diplomatic pressure from India and the US. Her first statement on taking over reiterated Pakistan's resolve to continue with its controversial nuclear programme.

More important, as the Kashmir crisis escalates, thanks primarily to New Delhi's mindless repression of the Kashmiri autonomy movement, Bhutto will be under pressure to take belligerent positions to counter India's charges that Pakistan has been aiding and abetting the militants. In the game of competitive nationalism that often marks politics in south Asia, she will find herself hostage to Sharif and other opponents.

It is difficult to see a breakthrough on Kashmir, the nuclear issue and the border dispute with India

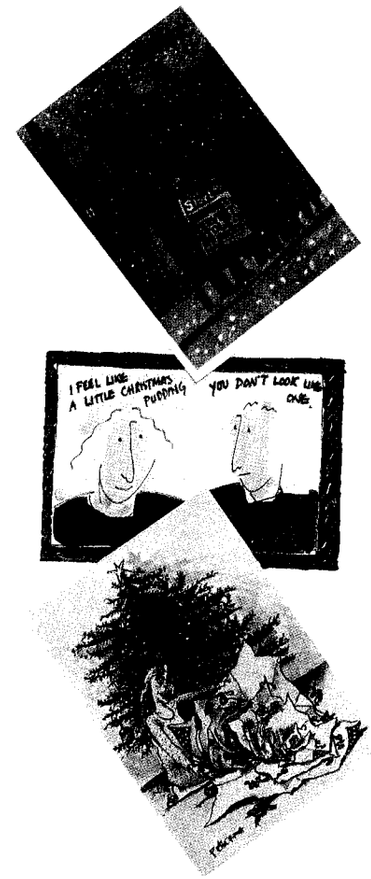
As things stand now, it is difficult to see a breakthrough on Kashmir, the nuclear issue and the border dispute with India. Thus, perfectly manageable problems that cry out for a solution are unlikely to be addressed—for example, the utterly insane confrontation between Indian and Pakistani troops since 1985 over Siachen Glacier at a height of more than 8,000 metres (26,660 feet) in the upper Himalayas. It is here that, to assert their claims over an unmarked border, thousands of soldiers—250 a year from the Indian side alone, and perhaps a similar number from Pakistan—have been made to die, mostly from frostbite.

To put it starkly, Bhutto has two options before her: to make a radical break with the conservative, weak-kneed, compromised, pro-establishment, soft-on-landlords approach she has recently adopted, or to make more and more compromises that weaken her, and ultimately reduce her chances of political survival.

The first course means seeking popular plebeian, legitimacy for a modernist programme of thoroughgoing reform, and building on democratising tendencies in Pakistan, as well as reaching a post-cold war detente with India. The second entails retreating from the PPP's own stated goals and losing its political base.

It is not clear which option Bhutto will choose. But it is certain that if she wastes this second chance to stabilise democracy in Pakistan, she may not get a third one.

New Statesman Christmas Postcard offer



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The right is fundamentally unstable, argues sociologist **Anthony Giddens**. What we need is a new conservatism of the left

Dare to care, conserve and repair

John Major, as everyone knows, is in big trouble. But why? There is, of course, a personalised story that can be told to explain his predicament. British politics, after all, was dominated for a long while not only by Thatcherism, but by the commanding figure of Mrs Thatcher herself. John Major, it is said, is a lacklustre figure—chosen for that very trait—who was bound eventually to suffer from comparison with the bold and decisive leader who preceded him.

Yet why hasn't Major been able to rebuild at least something of the consensus that served the Tory party so well for so long? Is it just the divisiveness of Maastricht, combined with a horrendous series of bungles? And why hasn't Labour been able to make much political capital out of all this? Perhaps, as some suggest, it is just that the Labour Party is limping along with a colourless leader too?

The surface story, no doubt, has some elements of truth in it. But we can't answer these questions properly unless we delve behind this superficial sort of view. To understand what's happening in British politics today—and where future trends might lead—we have to uncover some of the deep-rooted changes that are taking place in modern societies more generally. These changes help us to illuminate with some clarity what has befallen socialism; but they also reveal why conservatism faces difficulties all of its own.

A series of very important—and connected—processes of transformation are affecting the industrialised countries today (and much of the rest of the world besides). All are of a general nature, but they have very specific consequences. The first is all-encompassing—it is the influence of what has come to be called "globalisation". The term is talked about a lot but, as yet, it is a notion that is only poorly understood. Globalisation is not about the development of a world society; and it is not something that takes place only in the remote arena of big business and international relations. The term is really a shorthand one for a series of influences that are altering not just events on the large-scale, but the very tissue of our everyday lives.

Globalisation expresses the increasing role of "action at a distance" in human social affairs. In other words, to an increasing degree, our lives are influenced by activities and happenings that occur at a great distance from us. Thus, the value of the pound in one's pocket can be affected overnight by events happening on the other side of the world.

The opposite is also true: the actions we take as individuals today are globally consequential—a decision to purchase a certain item of clothing, for example, has implications not only for the global economy but for the world's ecosystems. Globalising influences are not at all necessarily unifying. On the contrary, they often serve to fragment and divide; and they call forth a welter of conflicting responses. A renewed stress on local cultural identity, the springing up of a diversity of nationalisms from Quebec to the Basque country, can plausibly be seen precisely as an outcome of globalisation, which alters the relation between the local and the global.

One of the main effects of a globalising social order, in fact, is that local spheres of activity become, as it were, "invaded" from the outside. The result is a wholesale series of changes in personal and local life and in the society at large. We encounter a greater diversity of experiences than ever before, and are forced to adapt and alter many of our habits and pre-existing ways of behaviour. Sociologists refer to this as a process of "detraditionalisation". Our society has become, or is becoming, a post-traditional one. A post-traditional society is not one in which traditions disappear—in some respects, indeed, traditions may become reactivated or revitalised. It is a society in which tradition changes its status: people now have to give *reasons* as to why the traditions they follow, or want to defend, should continue to exist.

This is odd, because the whole point of traditions is that you don't have to justify them. Traditions lay claim to "ritual truth": they simply *are*, and that's all there is to it. In a globalising, cosmopolitan order, the ritual truth of tradition comes under attack. This applies not only to the grander elements of tradition (such as the monarchy) but also to more everyday traditions—such as those affecting gender, marriage and the family.

Partly because of the struggles of the feminist movement, but also because of the influences promoting detraditionalisation, gender identities have become open to scrutiny and public debate—as have the institutions in which they used to be caught up. Much (for better or for worse) has become "open": we have to decide about a whole range of things that used to be "settled" by the fixities of tradition. And once exposed to such public debate, traditional symbols that used to seem quite august, can, with a sudden switch, come to appear almost absurd. The status of the royal family is just such a case.

It is detraditionalisation that explains the arrival of fundamentalism in our midst. The term "fundamentalism" wasn't even in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as late as 1950; we're dealing here with a quite recent phenomenon. What is fundamentalism, and why has it become so important? Fundamentalism is nothing other than tradition defended in a traditional way—but in a world where that defence has become archaic and problematic.

Fundamentalism is dangerous, because essentially it is a refusal of dialogue, a rejection of the giving of reasons. Hence it is everywhere edged with potential violence. We shouldn't speak just of "fundamentalism", but of fundamentalisms: there are as many areas of fundamentalism as there are threatened traditions. We normally think of fundamentalism in relation to religion. But there are also fundamentalisms of nationalism, and ethnicity; and of gender and the family. The persistence of forms of "gender fundamentalism", for instance, is clearly linked to patterns of sexual violence.

In a detraditionalising society, for most people, most of the time, the giving of reasons for what we do becomes almost second nature. People become, and have to become, reflective about their lives because they can no longer depend on inherited customs from the past to spell out how they should act. And, against the backdrop of globalisation, this reflectiveness often includes a wide range of situations. We can speak today of the existence of a citizenry of *clever people*. I don't mean by this that people are more intelligent than they used to be, but that, almost willy-nilly, they are compelled to engage with a much wider world than before, and do so in an active way.

The rise of this "reflexivity" helps us to understand some otherwise seemingly disconnected changes taking place in different spheres over the past few years. It is generally agreed, for example, that the sorts of mass, standardised production systems known as "Fordism" in industry have become ineffective. In "post-Fordist" industrial organisations, they are replaced by more flexible systems, using a good deal of bottom-up decision-making. This development is often explained in technological terms, as the result of the increasing use of information technology, which cuts across standardisation.

The main influence, however, is almost certainly increasing social reflexivity. Clever people won't be treated as automatons, and

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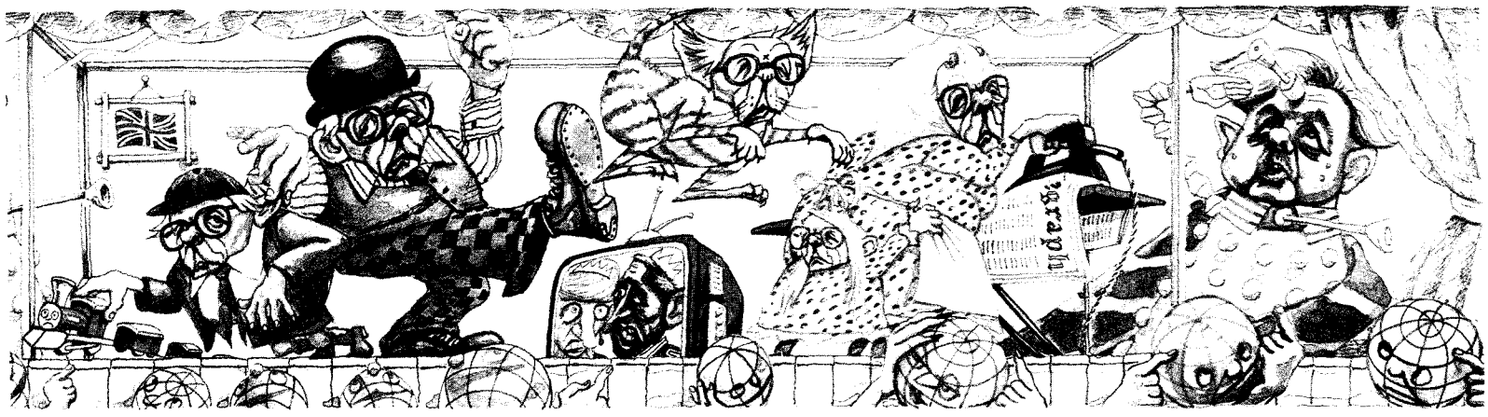

an organisation that doesn't allocate them a certain level of autonomy and involvement will become inefficient. The same applies to bureaucracies. Large-scale, impersonal, top-down bureaucratic power for a long while seemed the most effective way of building administrative structures. Bureaucracies of the old type, however, are becoming the dinosaurs of the post-traditional social order. Finally, states and governments can no longer get along by treating their citizens as passive subjects; the demand for more flexibility and citizen involvement is as strong here as anywhere else.

In the light of these observations, we can begin to see more clearly why socialism is ailing. In the shape of the Keynesian welfare state (in the west) and state-controlled communism (in the east), socialism worked tolerably well for quite a while. It worked because the centralised direction of economic life was quite effective when levels of globalisation were relatively low and lifestyle patterns remained fairly fixed and stable. Such is no longer the case in a much more reflexive, cosmopolitan world.

Socialism was always based on the idea of subjecting the lower levels of the economy to "intelligent" central direction. But this doesn't work well with systems that have become highly complex and reflexive—as has happened to modern economies and social conditions. Systems of this sort depend for their coherence on a great number of low-level inputs (supplied in markets by the intermeshing of millions of decisions about price-setting and purchasing).

On the face of things, conservatism thus seems to reign triumphant—with its old enemy in disarray, shorn of its supposed historic role. Yet the troubles of John Major in the end may turn out to be even more perplexing than those of John Smith. For if not yet wholly dead, conservatism has become caught in a hopeless contradiction. Conservatism today, as is plain enough, is not conservatism as it once was. The dominant strand of conservatism, represented in something of an extreme form by Mrs Thatcher, is the New Right or neo-liberalism. Yet the neo-liberals are not conservative, or they are only so in a peculiar and paradoxical way.

The neo-liberals are the declared opponents of tradition; but it has always been the protection of tradition, nurtured from the past, that has defined what conservatism actually *is*. The neo-liberals unleash the full weight of market forces, and allow them to play where they will; and market forces are no respecters of traditional institutions or practices. Rather, they corrode and destroy them. Conservative becomes set against conservative—the *Telegraph*, with its continuing affiliation to Old Toryism, against the *Sunday Times*, with its brash advocacy of the entrepreneurial spirit.

In this clash, however, conservatism is destroying the very sources of legitimacy upon which it depends. For conservatism, even of the neo-liberal sort, can't do without the traditional symbols that give it its *raison d'être*. Neo-liberalism, therefore, consists of a highly unstable mix of market individualism and fundamentalism—an insistence on the "strong nation" and a dogmatic assertion of "family values" based on traditional notions of marriage and gender roles. The one subverts the other. The very pathologies that the New Right discerns in the disintegration of civic virtues and family values come from the corrosive effects of the market forces they so forcefully endorse.

All things are possible, but it would probably take a stronger and more imaginative figure than John Major to hold together such contradictions—which find concrete expression in the Maastricht controversies, but run way beyond. Yet what can the left do in response—if we grant that "left" and "right" still make some sense in politics today? Is there still a place for radical politics, or are the only viable political ideas to be found on the middle ground—staked out in this country by the Liberal Democrats?

Of course, endless columns have been written about how we might "reinvent the left", or how the Labour Party can seize back the initiative it has lost. These won't, and can't, amount to much, however, if they are variations on the socialist project, seeking only to "modernise" it or bring it up to date.

Our starting point should be that there already *is* a radical politics around today and it is a highly destructive one. This is precisely the politics of neo-liberalism, with the contradictions it brings in its train. A radical politics that leans to the left should disavow radicalism for its own sake; it should be concerned with repair, conservation and care as much as with "taking control of history" in a process of endless change. And these concerns must be shaped in such a way that they inform the—still necessary—critique of domination and inequality.

In the altered social conditions of today, the left has something to learn from conservatism. I don't mean the conservatism of the neo-liberals, however, or the defence of tradition and hierarchy associated with Old Toryism. What I have in mind is what might be called "philosophic conservatism", that conservatism which seeks to enhance social solidarity, protect continuity and connect past, present and future generations. It is surely not accidental that the political movement that can lay greatest claim to taking over where the orthodox left has become blocked, the green movement, advocates values just such as these. The rather obvious similarities between conservation and conservatism have been hidden by the fact that the left has tried to incorporate the green movement within its own "progressive" agenda.

Yet someone looking for an alternative radical politics today would be ill-advised to suppose that all the answers can be found in green philosophy. For the greens are prone to what some critics quite properly have termed the "naturalistic fallacy". Our problems come from the destructive attitudes we have towards nature, so green reasoning goes; hence the remedy must be to return to nature and restore it to its pristine form.

But "nature" has largely ceased to exist, if we mean by this the existence of an environment uninfluenced by human intervention. Nature has been transformed, in fact, in much the same sense as tradition. Both used to form fairly fixed "landscapes" of human action; each is now much more malleable and confronts us with new sorts of decisions. Think, for example, of the influence of reproductive technologies and the control they now give us over conception. How can we turn to "nature" to answer questions that come precisely from our own interventions into it?

The preservation and renewal of the environment, certainly, has to be a key part of a reconstituted radical politics, but must be integrated into a wider set of concerns. These include the repair of social solidarity, the control of fundamentalism and the fostering of civic morality. The key question that raises itself is how far such objectives are compatible with the globalised, reflexive social conditions in which we now live—and with ideas of participation, justice and equality that have long been the stuff of socialism.

There is some reason to be optimistic on this front. Neo-liberalism makes the mistake of equating social reflexivity with self-seeking, market-oriented behaviour. Yet the two are not at all the same. The reflective individual

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has to "create a life" in a much more active way than before. Yet this demand actually generates new modes of interdependence, which can be the origin of renewed forms of social solidarity.

Consider as an example the position of the family, deeply embroiled in political disputes today, for reasons already alluded to. The idea of a return to "traditional family values", a major prop of neo-liberal thinking, is simply a non-starter. For one thing, we know that there was a dark side to the traditional family, with its history of the physical and sexual abuse of children and of domestic violence. It was based, moreover, on traditional forms of sexual subordination which, in some part at least, have disappeared. Women are not about to decamp *en masse* from the paid labour force and retreat into a domesticity from which they struggled to break free.

Why should we suppose, however, that the emergence of a diversity of family forms is the same thing as family disintegration? It's quite possible to argue that parents and children might in some circumstances be more, rather than less, responsible and interdependent than before. A rebuilding of family solidarities, and a concern for the well-being of children, is in some ways promoted by the very increases in equality that contemporary relationships tend to involve. We should take the neo-liberals' worries about the family very seriously, but not their suggested remedy. Instead, philosophic conservatism supplies the clue: we need to reconstruct the continuity of the generations in the new social conditions of today.

In all this democracy must play a large part. Everyone now has become a democrat: the spread of democracy is the success story of our time. Yet here again there is a paradox, or a seeming one. For the very triumph of liberal democracy seems to coincide with a period of disillusionment and decay; respect for political leaders is at a low ebb and many voters have a disenchantment with the political process altogether. John Major's troubles, as is evident enough, come from this source also.

The combined success and failure of liberal democracy can be interpreted in terms of the social changes discussed earlier. Democracy is the only style of government appropriate to a society of clever people; yet at the same time such a citizenry comes to expect more than just the rituals of a corrupt party politics. There is a wide open space here for the democratising of democracy—for the creation of greater visibility, and open public dialogue, in government. And enhanced dialogue, in turn, is the main means of combating the dangers, and the potential violence, of fundamentalisms: for when there is debate, and open discussion, there is interchange of views rather than intolerance and exclusion.

There are wide tracts of new territory here for the left to colonise. Socialist values still can help guide this exploration, but a pronounced spirit of heterodoxy will be needed to give them any real purchase. Odd though it may seem, a judicious turn towards conservatism can help the left find its feet again.

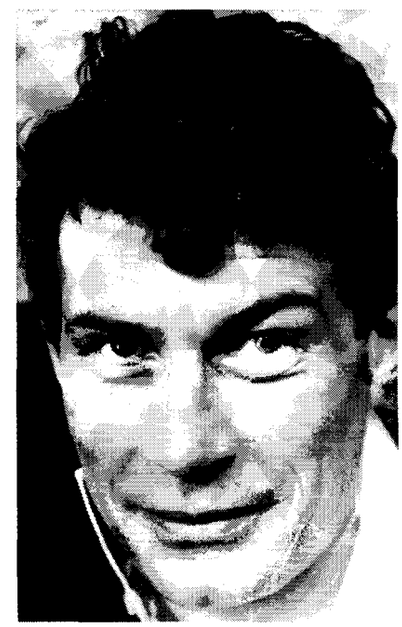
Anthony Giddens is professor of sociology at Cambridge University. A version of this article was presented to an Institute for Public Policy Research conference last month

John Berger finds inspiration in the photo of an unnamed woman defender of the Russian parliament building

A photocopy

Olga. I call you that because I don't know your name. Nor your age. My guess is 19. All I know for certain about you is that you were in Moscow on the evening of Sunday 3 October 1993.

You have a bandaged head wound. The bandage is not very visible because you're wearing a *chapka* that you took from a soldier who has just been killed. You also took his fur jacket and army belt which you are wearing. I guess you took his gun too, but it's not in the photograph. You took them as if he had bequeathed them to you. He was fighting on your side. Probably he was one of the Cossacks who had crossed the lines to join Rutskoi.



John Berger: hoping that the people of Russia remember Stalingrad

You were wounded when you and several thousand others, barely armed, tried to take the television building of Ostakino. Now you have come back to defend the Russian parliament in the White House: the parliament that has been under siege for 12 days because it is said to be a danger to democracy.

You are pale, thoughtful. Your eyes have an expression that comes from looking intently at something that is neither close-at-hand nor distant. You are looking at the might-have-beens of a few hours ago. Now you know that the Omon troops, the forces of order, are shooting to kill. It has been decided in the Kremlin that more deaths are acceptable. Out there, their firepower is shattering.

You knew this and you came back to defend the White House since what is at stake is something more than either defeat or victory. Now that they want deaths, they are bound to win.

At stake is your delicacy and, for example, the belt you're wearing. It could have been from your father's uniform, even your grandfather's.

It is not only the rouble that has lost its value a thousandfold during the past two years. Everything once lived has lost its value. Everything has become junk for sale. Every day, in the streets, you have seen people selling treasures that were once close to their hearts in order to buy sugar or a pair of boots for the winter. All the sacrifices of three generations are now being sacrificed on the altar of the free market. And, once sacrificed, instantly spent so that nothing remains. Nothing.

With your delicacy you came to protest against that nothing.

The news headlines pretended that you were nostalgic for communism and were a threat to democracy. According to them, you took your country to the brink of civil war, Olga, then, fortunately, the people were saved by Yeltsin, backed by the statesmen of the west.

The memory of the people, however, is not as short as the dealers assume. And this is already visible in your face. It is hard to decide whether you are a child or a grandmother. (At historic moments, two, three, even four generations, are sometimes compressed and can co-exist within the lived experience of a single hour. Those who believe that history is finished have forgotten about this.)

It is hard to tell whether you came to defend the White House because you have classmates who have emigrated to become prostitutes in Hamburg or Zurich, or because you remember losing a husband in the battle of Stalingrad. This, too, is part of your delicacy.

The dealers of the free market and their corollary, the mafia, assume they now have the world in their pocket. They have. But to maintain their confidence they have to change the meaning of all the words that were once used in the language to explain or praise or give value to life: every word, according to them now, is the servant of profit. And so they have become dumb. Or, rather, they can no longer speak any truth. Their language has become too withered for that. As a consequence, they have also lost the faculty of memory. This is a loss that will prove fatal.

Tomorrow, Olga, a friend will change your bandage.

Of the photograph I make this verbal photocopy, so that some who missed the photo may see you.

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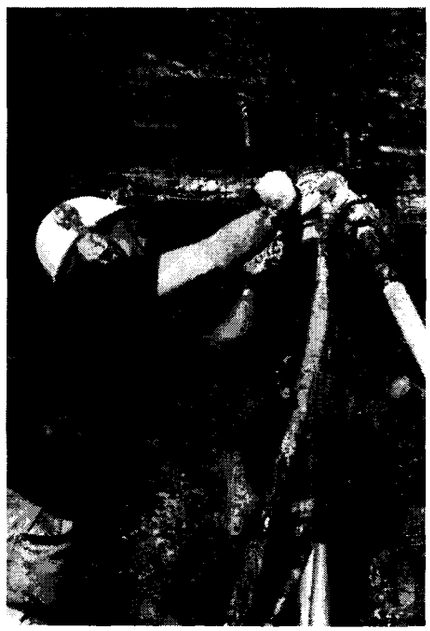
The tragedy at Bilsthorpe followed a change of policy within British Coal, despite warnings given in 1990. **Ken Coates** reports

Bolting for cover



John Giles/Press Association

Miners rock bolting (top), while survivor Paul Smith is comforted by his fiance Louise Taylor after the fatal roof collapse (above)

On the morning of 18 August, an enormous fall of ground took place at Bilsthorpe colliery. Three men were killed, and three others were trapped. A heroic rescue effort finally released those who had survived the collapse.

Last month, the Health and Safety Executive brought forward an interim report on the disaster. It gives a graphic description of the accident, and a detailed story of the rescue operation. There follows an account of the probable cause of the fall, and the events that led to it. A preliminary attempt is then made to analyse the factors influencing the fall, and to determine its volume and mass.

The speed of publication has been welcomed, but it is likely that the report was rushed out because of widespread suspicion, within the industry and beyond it, that reliance on roof bolts as a sole means of support might have contributed to the disaster. Roof bolts or rockbolts are giant rawlplugs that are installed in long bore holes and laced with a resin that bonds them to the strata. Several mining unions have expressed concern over sole reliance on them, although they are welcomed as auxiliary support systems.

The general opinion was strongly expressed before a parliamentary select committee, which reported in December 1990. At that time, the chief inspector of mines, Dr Mike Jones, gave his opinion that steel arch girders were safer than roof bolts. The select committee, having heard many other witnesses testify similarly, decided: "We cannot endorse the use of roof bolts. We emphasise that roof bolts, even with straps, should not be used as the sole form of roof support unless they can be shown to be as safe as or safer than the alternatives. We are not aware of any such conclusive demonstration."

This opinion was widely supported in the industry. The colliery deputies' trade union, Nacods, sent a memorandum to the committee: "In recent years British Coal has sought to move over to roof bolt-only support. This may be ideal in the correct conditions but we concur with the NUM that UK conditions are not guaranteed to be the correct conditions."

At that time, Dr Jones was able to inform the select committee: "To my knowledge, there are not any roadways in British Coal mines supported entirely on roof bolts." But this situation was about to change. Perhaps because it intuitively suspected this, the select committee recommended that: "As a matter of urgency, the chief inspector of mines [should] establish guidelines indicating circumstances [in which] roof bolts may safely be used."

Last month, I wrote to the director general of the Health and Safety Executive, J D Rimington, and asked him for a copy of the guidelines, which the select committee had asked him to prepare "as a matter of urgency". He replied: "Following the select committee's recommendation on rockbolts, the chief inspector of mines initiated a number of studies and meetings with British Coal. As a result British Coal developed a code of practice entitled 'The Support of Mine Roadways by Rockbolts' incorporating the technical advice of HSE's Mines' Inspectorate. With the agreement of British Coal, I enclose a copy for your information."

But the British Coal code, "The Support of Mine Roadways by Rockbolts", was first issued in July 1990 *before* the select committee asked the HSE to prepare a code of its own. Operational instructions were revised after this select committee stipulation in December 1992, and issued in January 1993. But the British Coal code would hardly satisfy the select committee. The code it wanted did not concern *how* to operate roof bolting systems, but *whether* such systems should be installed in the first place. The code was needed not to guide mineworkers in correct practice, but to guide inspectors in the difficult decision about whether or not to authorise the sole use of rockbolts as support mechanisms.

Since Jones' evidence that British Coal had no roads relying only on roof-bolt support in 1990, the practice has become widespread. According to a letter from Rimington last month: "In excess of 70 km of roadway have, so far, been driven and solely supported by rockbolting systems. About another 30 km use rockbolts as the principal means of support in conjunction with other systems."

In view of the public concern, one would expect the Mines Inspectorate to be anxious to monitor the success of the new system. I asked Rimington about this, inquiring as to how many roof falls had been reported in roof-bolted workings, and what statistical records were available. He replied: "The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985 do not require the reporting of roof falls unless death or injury results. However, any major fall of roof which, although not reportable, comes to the attention of the Inspectorate would normally be inspected. Records are kept of roof falls resulting in an accident but these are not classified by the type of support where the fall occurred."

This is quite astonishing. To begin with, falls of ground that do not cause accidents may well be larger and potentially more hazardous than falls that do injure people. Thirty feet or more of roadway can collapse completely, over a weekend, and not be compulsorily reported because no one is hurt by it. True, Rimington assures me that if such falls were drawn to the attention of the Inspectorate, they would "normally be inspected". But if they are not recorded, how is it possible to reach an objective conclusion about whether roof bolts are safe in British conditions? The first elementary steps to put the matter on a scientific footing by collecting the appropriate statistics have not been taken. Worse still: even when a fall *does* cause an accident, this will not be classified in the statistics in such a way as to tell us which type of support was employed, and where the fall occurred.

Who is responsible for the decision not to collect and appropriately record the most basic statistics? Who is responsible for not acting on the select committee's urgent recommendation that an inspectorial code of practice be established? The answers to these questions are crucial to the lives and security of all those who work in our mines, from the highest management to the youngest recruit.

That is why I still think that the most important question raised at Bilsthorpe was: "Who will inspect the Inspectorate?"

Ken Coates is MEP for Nottingham

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Disabled people don't want pity or spiritual "healing", writes **Agnes Fletcher**, and they are fighting back against the non-disabled world's prejudices

Fighting for the right to be different

Piss on Pity, blared the banners, "Blinded and crippled by tragic disease" teased the T-shirts, at my first encounter with the radical disability movement. It was the Block Telethon demo outside the London Weekend Television Centre, July 1992, and I was on the brink of coming out as a disabled person.

My main concern, after years of feeling an isolated misfit in a non-disabled world, was whether, as someone with an almost invisible impairment, I would be accepted as a disabled person. In the warm sunshine and the warmth of everyone around me, I began to relax. It was fun.

Later, things really hotted up. Some demonstrators moved from behind the safety barriers to persuade the waiting Telethon audience not to enter the studios. A few people did leave the queue, to huge rounds of applause. After a march around the building, with hundreds of demonstrators chanting "Rights not Charity", a few people stormed in; two actually reaching the stage and a stunned Michael Aspel. Meanwhile, another group was smashing through the doors into the underground car park.

Alan Holdsworth, national organiser of the Direct Action Network (DAN), the disability movement's civil disobedience stalwarts, explains the rationale for the demo: "Telethon represents the ultimate in public begging. It takes the charity concept into the homes of millions, selling the message that disabled people are objects of charity; perpetual children. It misleads the general public into thinking they are supporting disabled people and perpetuates the idea that the problems disabled people face are due to their medical conditions, rather than a result of the non-disabled world's attitudes and the denial of our civil rights."

The Direct Action Network has been around for about two years, and has been rapidly developing its reach and sophistication. It has recruited at demonstrations and within the trade union movement, and now has a national register of more than a thousand disabled activists who are willing to take part in civil disobedience.

"Our constituency at DAN is those people," Holdsworth adds. "Those activists, usually the most radical disabled people in their area, who aren't getting a lot of support from others who think that writing letters and visiting MPs is the answer." The Telethon demo, with its speeches and songs, wasn't civil disobedience, according to Holdsworth. "Civil disobedience was when we smashed the barricades. That was the point when DAN became DAN."

A few years ago, Holdsworth helped to organise the Disability Benefits Consortium rally. "We put 3,000 people on the streets, but they're still cutting benefits. A day in the spotlight isn't enough. Everyone's fighting their own corner or every corner. That won't work." It was after this rally that many disabled people decided smaller, well-planned episodes of direct action were the best way forward.

This July, during another glorious summer of discontent, about 70 disability activists travelled to Christchurch to disrupt the by-election campaign of Conservative candidate Robert Hayward. They demonstrated outside Hayward's campaign office, shouted at him when he spoke at a meeting attended by Home Secretary Michael Howard and plastered the town with "Don't vote Hayward" stickers.

Members of DAN had travelled from London, Bristol, Coventry, Derby, Manchester and Southampton to take part. They were targeting Hayward because, in January 1992, the former Kingswood MP "talked out" Alf Morris' Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. The spectre of VAT being levied on fuel played a starring role, but it is clear that the activists had a major impact on voters. Hayward himself was visibly shaken. According to DAN: "He can stand in 50 by-elections, but we'll be there to remind voters of who he is and what he did."

Christchurch was simply too good an opportunity to pass up. "A weak government, the man who talked out the civil rights bill standing again having been kicked out. There couldn't be a better platform for anti-discrimination legislation," says Holdsworth.

"If we'd passed up the opportunity there, we'd have deserved all the charity we get." The demo helped to prove the strength of the network. With two weeks planning, DAN was able to bring 70 people to Christchurch. "We wouldn't have been able to do that two years ago." At its first national conference on 1 October, DAN decided to focus on anti-discrimination legislation and in particular on transport.

Last year's Telethon action was uncontrolled, spontaneous, unplanned. Christchurch was different. "We targeted something, we had a strategy and we did it," declares Holdsworth. It required an enormous amount of discipline behind the scenes. There were those who wanted to block buses, storm the campaign offices, hold a sit-in. "But we knew we'd already won," Holdsworth says. "The press were there and we knew our message was getting across. At the end of the day we marched up and down the street, and we were getting applauded by the voters of Christchurch."

"Telethon is the ultimate in begging, selling the message that disabled people are objects of charity"

One young woman who was at Christchurch told me: "It's like a carnival. Thrilling. What was new in Christchurch was that people passing joined in, offering to hand out leaflets. They didn't hurry by, averting their eyes. First they expressed interest, then they pledged their support."

Holdsworth explains what being on a demo can be like: "I was the first person at Telethon. It's really weird. There are all those people over there and only one of you. You just hope someone else is going to turn up. Initially, there's quite a lot of fear—like when we were pushing out of the campaign meeting in Christchurch, 30 of us and 400 rabid Tories. That was terrifying. The more we do it, though, the more we know it's going to work, how it works."

Holdsworth has talked to many other disabled people about what direct action gives them as individuals. Of Block Telethon, he says: "That demo for most people was the proudest day of their lives—when it could have been the most disastrous, if they'd sat at home and watched it on telly. There's a feeling of certainty among the people who come and a confirmation of everything they've thought through for themselves. It does get really emotional. People say beforehand, 'I'm not going to get arrested, am I?' Next minute, they're the ones who are jumping on the police. That's the sort of thing we need to control. We're getting there but we don't want to lose the emotion."

Holdsworth can recall only one protest that didn't go well. It was a last-minute arrangement—the Stars Organisation for Spastics annual gala at the Hackney Empire: "There were only eight of us and more wheelchair users going in than outside. If we'd had 20 we'd have been all right. We just gave out leaflets and then went to the pub."

Where impairment and disability are concerned, emotions run high on all sides. Sue Elsegood, a DAN local organiser, arranged demonstrations against tele-evangelist Morris Cerullo's mission to London in August this year. About 50 disabled people demonstrated, leafleting the miracle-seekers flocking to Earl's Court in search of the false grail of a cure.

"They were quite hostile to us and to our ideas," Elsegood recalls. "There were a lot of arguments; people saying that we had

Stephen Wilson/Select

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Disabled people attacking superstition through direct action, forcing people to confront their prejudices

demons that needed casting out, that we were evil." One of the protesters' "Rights not Miracles" leaflets was appropriated by a particularly passionate pilgrim. She wrote "Jesus loves you" on it and handed it back. Other flocking afflicted launched themselves on the demonstrators, hugging and kissing them, trying to carry them inside.

Many disabled people are extremely vulnerable to the sort of creed that Cerullo, and those like him, offer; when, to use the feminist-forged expression, they have internalised their own oppression. I can testify to that. As an extremely depressed 12-year-old, bearing, and frequently having to bare, my "deformity" as a badge of shame, I gratefully welcomed the attentions of my school's Christian union in a "laying on of hands" to cure my curvature of the spine. After all, I was a freak; genetically tainted.

As Queer academic and disability activist Tom Shakespeare explains, direct action is a form of social protest that forces non-disabled people to confront their stereotypical attitudes to disabledpeople, and it also encourages disabled people to celebrate themselves and to forge new identities. "It is a way of focusing attention on the institutions and environments that create disability: the inaccessible transport, the demeaning television charity spectaculars. It is an overtly political act, showing that disability is a matter of social relations, not medical conditions."

Sue Elsegood had to lend her accessible van to police when she and other wheelchair users were arrested

For the disability movement, direct action illustrates the way style and method can reinforce the content of a campaign. When the Campaign for Accessible Transport brought Oxford Street to a standstill, with wheelchair users chaining themselves to buses, Sue Elsegood had to lend her accessible van to police when she and other wheelchair users were arrested. Proceedings against the protesters at Horseferry Road Magistrates Court had to be brought to an early end, as the building was inaccessible to disabled people.

In the US, third birthday celebrations for the Americans with Disabilities Act this July included a "crawl-in" to inaccessible restaurants in Austin, Texas. The *New York Times* carried a picture of a disability activist dragging himself across the floor of a fashionable but inaccessible eaterie.

Recent Anglo-American homosexual politics show a similar process of subverting stigma. The gay movement has salvaged the word "queer", a traditional insult, to refer to the new tendency of direct action, pride and political struggle. Many disabled activists use the word "cripple" or "crip" in a way that would be offensive if non-disabled people wielded it.

Shakespeare cites activists such as Peter Tatchell, who have talked in terms of sexual difference, with many people veering between orientations during their lives, perhaps coming out relatively late.

"If you say that most straight people have the potential for same-sex relations, and certainly have had those feelings from time to time but may be denying them, that goes some way towards explaining why they find it so uncomfortable and distressing to meet out gay people. Similarly, with disability, if non-disabled people deny that their body can limit them, can cause problems, will eventually fall to pieces, then you can understand why they find it so distressing to be with disabled people. Disabled people, as they walk down the street, get hassled, just as black people and lesbians and gays do, because they don't conform and because they remind the dominant culture of what it tries to forget—that difference exists; is in them as well."

Historically, what has helped many oppressed groups to survive is their pride in being different and their collective identity. As Rachel Hurst, chair of the Disabled Peoples' International European Community Committee puts it: "Disability, defined as a social construct, is a human rights issue. It is also a concept in which we can have pride; pride born out of slavery and oppression. Disability for most of us in the movement is a matter of pride—because of our history, because of who we are."

Apart from myself, I haven't identified anyone by their impairment in this article, and this is usual within the disability movement, which is concerned with social change, not medical diagnoses. It might be relevant in some contexts to know that a particular activist is a wheelchair user, Deaf, visually impaired, a person with learning difficulties or an invisible impairment, living with Aids or a survivor of the mental health system. Whether they have muscular dystrophy, epilepsy, diabetes or whatever is really their own affair.

Disabled people have traditionally been defined only by their impairments (an "epileptic"), divided into impairment groups ("the blind", "the mentally handicapped") and isolated from one another. To reject these divisions and definitions, and to identify oneself simply as a disabled person, is a political statement of allegiance to a group of people who have been disabled by society.

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One of the main achievements of the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People (BCODP), which was formed in 1981, is the identification of disability as a human rights issue. BCODP is an umbrella body, made up of 95 independent organisations controlled and run by disabled people. Since 1991, it has lobbied fiercely for anti-discrimination legislation.

Shakespeare compares the division between the "elite-level activities" of Stonewall, the lesbian and gay "tea-with-John Major" lobbying group, and Outrage, the more radical gay pressure group, with the distinction between BCODP's lobbying for anti-discrimination legislation and the rights of its member organisations and DAN's direct action and grassroots consciousness-raising. "Both approaches are needed. If you don't have the grassroots activity, then anything you win at legislative level can easily be lost. It's all very well having rights but that makes no difference if someone wants to beat you up."

Alan Holdsworth and BCODP's director Richard Wood both acknowledge that the disability movement in no way reaches the full constituency of disabled people. There are thousands of adults still warehoused in institutions, unable to choose what time they get up or go to bed, when they eat or use the lavatory. Wood says: "I always describe it as a war that disabled people find themselves in. A struggle for power over our own lives, nothing less. The people who have that power"—government, medical and welfare professionals, charities—"are not going to give it up easily."

Wood firmly believes that anti-discrimination legislation (ADL) for disabled people will reach the statute books in this country within five years: there is every chance that Labour and the Liberal Democrats will have ADL in their manifestos and it is becoming increasingly clear that disabled people have a political voice and that their votes are important.

At the BCODP annual general meeting at the beginning of October, Wood congratulated DAN on its achievements—most DAN members are also BCODP members and the two organisations will be working together. "We do have to keep talking to the politicians to make sure it's our legislation, not their legislation."

Back in 1983, when the first civil rights bill came before the Commons, Rachel Hurst attended a lobby of parliament that turned into a demo: Conservative MPs were being hauled in from all over the country to defeat the bill. "Five of us, all electric-wheelchair users, sat in the middle of the road in Parliament Square trying to stop the cars going in. Five wasn't enough, the traffic was going around us. The police simply picked us up, in our chairs, and deposited us on the pavement. In those days, disabled people weren't brave enough, weren't angry enough. Many people on that demo thought civil disobedience was for other groups, not for us. They didn't yet realise that they could, that they had, to take up the struggle for themselves."

Though disabled people are used to being gawped at, demonstrations are hard work: frightening, uncomfortable, potentially dangerous. "I've demonstrated in rain and snow. I've sat at all-night vigils in dense fog," says Hurst. "The worst reaction is when someone makes an abusive remark, but that's infrequent. Much more frequent are the cold stares of disapproval." But it's worth it.

One of BCODP's most successful actions happened back in December 1986. The government had just introduced guidelines that suggested cinemas shouldn't let in guide dogs or wheelchairs because of fire risk. BCODP organised a nationwide demonstration—two or three people outside each local cinema asking for signatures to a petition. It was "a filthy night up and down the country", Hurst recalls, "but there was a lot of solidarity." The government's guidelines were immediately withdrawn.

The disability movement has come a long way since the National League of the Blind first used a combination of direct action and parliamentary lobbying back in 1933. This year, 3 December marks the first European Day of Disabled Persons, a regional celebration of the new United Nations International Day. After the European Commission became interested, disabled people's organisations from across the European Community arranged a history-making first "European Disabled People's Parliament", which will be held in the debating chamber of the new, fully accessible parliament building in Brussels.

Yet some of the gains of the past few years are already being eroded. Disabled people and other groups, made vulnerable by the way society is organised to exclude them, are being used as scapegoats for current economic problems. On 22 April 1993, the European Parliament adopted a resolution condemning recent violent attacks against disabled people, including the killing of Bruno Kappi in the German town of Siegen in December 1992.

"Slapping-up spastics" is back, with disabled people being spat at in the streets; beaten up when seen using sign language. "Under Hitler, you would have been gassed" and "They must have forgotten you at Dachau" are the chilling taunts.

As Peter Hope, DAN's speaker at the recent Unity demonstration in south-east London, told the crowd: "We understand the nature of fascism. Never again will we let ourselves or any other group become the victims, forgotten or not, of humanity's inhumanity."

Between 1933 and 1939, at least 400,000 disabled people were sterilised in Germany. Unrecorded hundreds of thousands were killed in purpose-built gas chambers in hospitals and institutions. As someone with a hereditary impairment and, until major surgery, a highly visible one, I would have been one of them. With this recession and with developments in genetic testing, Hitler's concept of "useless eaters" and of purifying the gene pool are back.

"We have never been under such concerted attack as a group," warns Richard Wood, who has received a number of reports of abuse and actual violence towards disabled people in this country in the past six months. "The fascists are everywhere. If we don't take action, we will be steam-rollered."

Raising Standards

Mr Patten advises how to curb the BNP

Let them chant their 12 times table,
Let them wear their winter vests,
Learn of Baal, learn of Babel,
Let them pass their yearly tests.

May their faces, freshly flannelled,
Cluster round the home-made crib,
May their thoughts be surely channelled,
May their ink stay on the nib.

Football, netball, hockey, cricket,
Hula-Hoops and skipping ropes—
These confound what's really wicked,
Blow away ignoble hopes.

Every time you wear a blazer,
Every time you eat your pud,
Someone puts away a razor,
Suddenly believes in good.

If the teachers, newly barbered,
Furled themselves in scholars' gowns,
Louts like this should not be harboured
In our villages and towns.

Each headmaster in his study,
If he does not spare the rod,
Has the means to give a bloody
Nose to those who sneer at God.

Show the Fascists all their failings!
Set their causes firmly back!—
High above the playground railings
Raise the loyal Union Jack!

Bill Greenwell

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Sarajevo's citizens are dying because of UN and western inertia. MPs **Kate Hoey**, **Calum Macdonald** and **Malcolm Wicks** report on their visit to the "safe" city

Shot by both sides

If truth is the first casualty of war, then in the former Yugoslavia the "collateral damage" appears to have extended to language itself.

When UN commanders wanted to deflect the possibility of an American airstrike earlier this year, fearing that it might imperil their forces on the ground, a UN spokesman stepped into the breach to deny that Sarajevo was under seige. Infamously, he tried to insist instead that the city was simply occupying "a tactically disadvantaged position".

This was surely a low point in the rhetoric of appeasement. Rather than civilian enclaves being under attack, they are henceforth to be deemed "tactically challenged".

Subsequently, when public pressure reached a crescendo, demanding that something be done to stop the thousands of shells raining daily on Sarajevo, words again came to the UN's rescue. Sarajevo, along with five other besieged enclaves, was felicitously declared to be under UN protection as a "safe area". The shelling appeared to stop, and the political pressure was lifted. A triumph for the UN? Did their words at last mean what we might expect them to?

Alas, no. When we visited Sarajevo last week, we saw for ourselves the true conditions. The citizens of Sarajevo have no gas, water or electricity. They are receiving less than half the UN-designated minimum survival ration. The target is 600 grams per person per day, 400 grams of which should be wheat-flour and 60 grams in beans and lentils. Basically, a hunk of bread per person per day. In fact, they are receiving less than 300 grams.

The airlift has been going on now for 470 days, longer than the Berlin airlift of 1948. Yet, whereas to save Berlin from the communists, the west made a quarter of a million flights delivering over two million tons of aid, the UN has managed fewer than 6,000 flights to Sarajevo, delivering just over 60,000 tons. The appalling truth is that the siege still being imposed on Sarajevo and other enclaves by the nationalist Serbs is immeasurably more effective and debilitating than the international sanctions imposed on Serbia. Indeed, one makes a mockery of the other.

The UN military presence, instead of working to lift the siege, appears almost to enforce it. It is the UN that refuses to let Bosnian parliamentarians out of Sarajevo to speak to parliamentarians abroad. It is the UN that denied permission to artists from the Obala gallery to visit the Edinburgh festival. It is the UN that does not allow visitors and journalists leaving Sarajevo to carry more than six letters each on behalf of the blockaded and incommunicado citizens left behind.

Nor is Sarajevo truly a safe area. When we were there, some 150 shells a day were falling on the city, rising to 500 at the weekend. The daily toll of civilians killed is around two to three, again rising to ten at the weekend.

Two thousand shells a fortnight is considerably less intense a bombardment than the 2,000 shells a day of mid-summer. That is why shops are reopening and people are out walking again, rather then hiding in their cellars. But imagine 150 IRA bombs a day exploding in the centre of London, and the press reaction if the government blandly announced that London was "safe".

Despite this, the striking thing about Sarajevo is the desperate desire to maintain a vestige of normal, civilised life. Amid the continuing shelling and the incessant crackle of small-arms fire, the small Obala art gallery receives 100 visitors every day. In the city centres, there are no army uniforms or guns to be seen. The soldiers who come off the front lines go straight home to change out of their fatigues. They do not want to be Rambos; they just yearn to be normal.

One family received us in their home. The house was neat and spacious, the mood light and friendly. It could have been anywhere in western Europe. But daily life for this family was far from our norm. One daughter had already been shot in the leg. Another had recently got up from a chair moments before a sniper's bullet passed through it, and the whole family narrowly escaped injury when a mortar landed on their garden patio. The chairs on which we sat were already earmarked for winter firewood.

The world's media has moved on, the Serbs feel safe to resume their war of attrition, and western governments feel safe to turn a blind eye

The outrage is that each shell fired at Sarajevo is counted by UN monitors placed with the Serbian positions for the purpose. The monitors track the shells as they descend on the city's residents, count the dead and wounded, and log a daily report to New York. But no attempt is made to stop the shelling or to fulfil the ultimatum, issued in the summer, that any further Serbian shelling of civilians would be responded to by air attacks. The world's media has moved on, the nationalist Serbs feel safe to resume their war of attrition, and western governments feel safe to turn a blind eye.

Ordinary UN personnel on the ground are working their hearts out and risking their lives daily to do what they can. But the UN's policy of official impartiality between victim and aggressor, between besiegers and besieged, between snipers and the women in their gun sights, is a mission impossible. It is wrong in principle, perverse in practice and is steadily eroding respect and authority for the UN.

The emerging UN-speak reaches all the way down the chain of command. In Zagreb, we met a stranded UNHCR convoy organiser. We asked him if he did not feel angry and frustrated that the Serbs had for four months stopped any convoy, including his, from reaching the besieged pocket of Maglaj. He quickly corrected me. "UN convoys are never stopped," he said, "They may be seriously delayed, but they are never stopped." "For four months?" we queried. He shrugged.

Of course, the grandmaster of virtual reality is Radovan Karadzic. While waiting to see Karadzic in his incongrously beautiful "capital" of Pale, we heard a loud bang from a nearby gun. The local UN monitors confirmed that the shell would land seconds later in a residential part of Sarajevo. We opened our meeting with Karadzic by asking him why he was still shelling Sarajevo when he had agreed to a ceasefire. "What shelling?" he asked, insisting that he knew nothing about it. "It must be the Bosnians shelling themselves. They do it all the time to make us look bad." "But we heard artillery firing outside your window here just ten minutes ago," we protested. His face remained expressionless. "Really?" he said slowly, "I didn't hear anything."

Sarajevo faces disaster this winter unless western policy changes. If the UN is to be really serious about its humanitarian mission, it can either massively increase the airlifts, or it can use force to ensure delivery of aid by road. An increase in the airlifts would be expensive, but the cost could be reduced by sub-contracting air deliveries to non-governmental organisations and even to private airlines, as the Berlin airlift was. Forcing through the aid by road, of course, would mean a change of posture by the UN forces. It is a change that many UN soldiers would welcome, so long as they are given the wherewithal to accomplish the task. There is no question that this is within western capacity. The 12 EC countries between them currently have more than two million men under arms. If the UK is willing to spend £1.6 billion a year and station 18,500 troops in Northern Ireland to ensure that violence does not prevail, then the EC should devote a similar share of its resources to meeting the same challenge in the Balkans.

If the democracies had stood up to Hitler in 1938, instead of capitulating at Munich, Nazism could have been contained without a shot being fired. Once again, confrontation is looming between the principles of democratic pluralism and the virus or rabid nationalism infesting eastern and southern Europe. We can delay the confrontation, but we cannot avoid it, and the longer we delay, the more difficult and deadly it will be.

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SIDELINERS

Mildred Gordon welcomed, with open arms, the two-score Labour MCPs who last week showed contempt for her sex and her Trotskyist views by cynically making her the depository for their waste votes. "I'm just pleased to have gained so much support," she cooed, dismissing as "an insult to me and to those who voted for me to suggest that they did so frivolously or with any devious motive in mind."

There was nothing secret about the Labour MCPs' decision to sabotage the Labour leadership's efforts to increase the number of women frontbenchers by scattering their votes, or by plumping for the most unlikely *front-bench woman, the 70-year-old MP for* Bow and Poplar.

Without such cynical votes, Mildred Gordon would have attracted the votes only of her fellow Campaign Groupies, as one who has loyally followed their unofficial whip. She has opposed the expulsion of Militants and voted against the Gulf war, the defence estimates, the Prevention of Terrorism Bill, EC legislation, and for almost anything proposed by Tony Benn.

Within the hard-left Campaign Group, she belongs to the more Trotskyist strain, as the widow of Sam Gordon, a leading US Trotskyist and one-time secretary of the Trotskyist Fourth International. When McCarthyism drove them out of the US, he joined the Workers International League here, which became the Revolutionary Communist Party. Mildred secured the Trotskyist Socialist Organiser's endorsement as "a lifelong class fighter against capitalism and the reformist Labour leadership".

In 1985, she narrowly inherited Bow and Poplar from Ian Mikardo, defeating fellow hard-lefties Deidre Wood and John McDonnell on the fifth ballot in the selection contest, probably because she is an authentic Stepney-born East Ender, the daughter of a local Labour councillor. She herself became political during the Spanish civil war, joining the Labour Party in 1942.

Since her election in 1987, she has been in Labour's mainstream almost only in the field of education, as a retired teacher and NUT activist of 40 years experience. She has served on the select committee on education. But the MCPs who voted for her were not moved by her speeches urging more spending on school buildings in the East End to prevent the deterioration of learning there. "I know that from personal experience, as I have taught in prefabricated huts which are freezing in winter and boiling in summer."

It was almost touching to see how she reacted to the 81 votes she gained last week, as if she expected John Smith to reward her with a front-bench position for almost doubling her vote from 47 the previous year. Unfortunately for her, Smith ignored the increased votes bestowed on her by MCPs as completely as he ignored the decreased votes bestowed on his ineffective cronies: Gordon Brown, Ann Taylor, Jack Cunningham and Harriet Harman.

Andrew Roth

EDWARD PEARCE

For once the House was at its best, Sir Patrick Mayhew, statesmanlike, and even Dennis Skinner softly spoken

Normally the phrase, "the House at its best", meaning an absence of partisanship, covers ponderous and treacly sessions of commiseration in which everyone queues up to be statesmanlike. If we are observing the rite for some deceased politician, sincerity is rarely close at hand, and the phrase of awful old Belloc comes to mind: *I wept, for I had hoped to see him hanged.*

The House is not naturally good. To mingle grief and compassion in its bubbling sulphurous blood is to risk incompatibility. But that said, it must be conceded that Monday's little secular service for the nine people killed by the IRA in Shankill Road was good, real, from the heart, and in the case of Sir Patrick Mayhew, statesmanlike, a phrase dragged from this column only by a team of six.

More of that in a moment. But the concern of the Reverend Martyn Smyth was to protect the name of Desmond Frizzell, the fish-shop owner accused directly and by implication, in at least one broadcast, of links with the paramilitaries. Mr Frizzell was no such thing, but in the sad language of the Province, "a good Christian man". Nobody doubts that the Northern Irish know each other (and their MPs know constituents) with an intimate expertise unthinkable in Edgbaston or Alwoodley. If Mr Smyth vouches for him, then no one doubts Mr Frizzell.

Sir Patrick was saying something at once clear-cut and grave, and saying it with the public earnest it deserved

In this atmosphere, it was paradoxically possible to talk more clearly than it had been. We had the unearthly experience of Dennis Skinner putting aside his Albert Modley-on-downers act and speaking softly, gently (and very well) in quiet pursuit of an answer. Since other people calling each other "terrorist and enemy" had managed finally to agree—Mr Mandela and Mr de Klerk; Mr Arafat and Mr Rabin—why might it not be so here?

Mr Skinner's was the only voice raised, albeit very effectively, for continuation of the process begun by John Hume. It is not days since earnest leaders have been published urging upon Sir Patrick and Mr Major the statesmanship of taking the difficult bridge that the Hume-Adams talks might be throwing over the river. But with the river on fire it looks like a bridge over hell, and the greatest eloquence of a formidably well-spoken day was the silence of Mr Hume. He sat there in a dark suit looking sick, leaving the words to his deputy, Seamus Mallon, and to Dr Joe Hendron, who tending wounded constituent patients as he does, sometimes seems the Hon Member for Media Res.

The point appeared to have been taken best over in the Republic where Dick Spring, the foreign minister, had settled that a planned ministerial meeting for talks would look like an irrelevant affront and should be cancelled.

Nobody doubts that the terrible deaths of the fathers and mothers of children has helped the government out of a spot of serious and embarrassing trouble as between their new parliamentary allies, the Unionists, and growing consensual support for the talks. The nice thing about Sir Patrick's speech was that he sounded as if he would much sooner have had the trouble.

The Northern Ireland Secretary is one of those politicians whom one cheerfully sends up a little. He can come the heavy lawyer, demonstrating visible responsibility. But the gravitas can also turn into seriousness at serious things; and there is for all the formality, a human being there. On days like this, which demand the full-dress qualities of politics, the formality and the humanity proclaiming a hard-cast formula—"We will talk to the users of violence when they put aside violence forever"—was exactly right. Oddly enough, Sir Patrick's old fashioned air belongs with the politician who is respected and stays respected. He was whoring after no popularity, but saying something at once clear-cut and grave, and saying it with the public earnest it deserved.

The point is, of course, that the government has not merely been got out of a spot of tactical trouble, it has had its deep strategic scepticism about the getting better of things horribly confirmed. All serious Conservatives are philosophic pessimists. People like Mr Hume, Mr MacNamara and Clare Short are disposed toward Rousseau, believing that with trouble and pains, Adam may be raised up. Events on the Shankill Road serve as evidence to keep the Fall in good standing as a working hypothesis.

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LETTERS

There are apologies and apologies, as every Private Eye reader will be aware. For the benefit of doubt, then, there are at least two due this week that are meant sincerely.

First, an apology to Phil Edwards for our failure to credit him for the piece he co-wrote with Paul Anderson on Searchlight's feud with Larry O'Hara ("Anti-racists at odds", 15 October) . I am afraid, though, that nothing could induce me (sorry Phil) to publish anything further on this long-running and unfortunate saga. The correspondence is now firmly closed.

Second, an apology to CND. CND chair Marjorie Thompson's letter speaks for itself: "Shoreditch wrongly reported last week that CND's officers were not present at our protest on 5 October against the Chinese nuclear test that had taken place earlier that day because they were meeting with the 'Chinese Peace Committee [sic]'. In fact, the CND general secretary was present and handed in a strongly worded letter of protest on behalf of all the officers who were not able to be at the embassy due to work commitments and distance from home. A meeting had been planned for 7 October with representatives of the Chinese People's Association for Peace and Disarmament but this was cancelled in protest at the Chinese test. NSS readers can rest assured that CND will remain in the forefront of the campaign against testing until we have achieved our goal of a comprehensive test ban treaty."

Others also have gripes about Shoreditch. Gregory Lauder-Frost, of London SW1 (or should that be Ford open prison?), for instance, complains that he has "never disseminated anti-semitic views, in any lecture that I have ever given, anywhere [see Shoreditch, 15 October]. My interest in any war, or part of history, is purely academic." We are happy to set the record straight. Lauder-Frost, a convicted fraudster and friend of the far right, has screened original Nazi propaganda films and played host to the likes of Jean-Marie Le Pen for academic reasons alone. And some of his best friends are Jewish . . .

On a related subject, there has been a substantial response to last week's cover story on the anti-racist march two weeks ago in Welling ("Or was it a police riot?"). A number of correspondents made similar points to those put by Narinder Dhanoa (see letter opposite).

It is instructive, in this context, to consider the remarks made by Anti-Racist Alliance chair Marc Wadsworth in last week's Weekly Journal, a new—and impressive—paper supplying "news from a black perspective". Wadsworth described the Anti-Nazi League, one of the principal organisers of the Welling march, as "a cynical attempt to lure people into the Socialist Workers Party, which does not give a damn about racism". He said that "the overwhelming majority" of the protestors "had very little interest in racism . . . They were mostly members of the SWP and other fringe groups who use the ANL as a way to recruit people into their extreme-left wing party." As a signatory to the ARA's founding appeal, can I suggest, ever-so-gently, that this is arrant, offensive nonsense; the cause of anti-racism deserves better of you, Marc.

Finally, a word about the "Save Steve Platt for Socialism Campaign", which I mentioned here last week. I have now received Communique No 2, which adds to the campaign's earlier demands ("That all future editors of NSS should have beards", "That a public subscription is entered into to erect a statue of Comrade Platt at the Bishopsgate entrance to Liverpool Street station", "That NSS is in future printed on very slightly tinted red paper to underline its politically correct position" and so on).

The campaign now demands that potential investors in NSS "produce evidence that [they] have had a beard for at least 80 per cent of the past ten years", and that "early consideration is given to putting NSS under writers' and readers' control, with no less than 50 per cent of the new controlling body being women, or men, with beards".

It's all enough to make me take up shaving.

Steve Platt

No hippy chick

Boyd Tonkin ("Generation excess", 22 October) is right to claim that for all Mrs Thatcher's posturing, our national culture is still presided over by unreconstructed, if closet, hippies. But that's because during that brilliant, flawed decade of the sixties, egalitarian/libertarian views were the *sine qua non* of cultural activity at all levels. In other areas of our national life, they were merely prevalent.

But Tonkin fails to mention something that is, in my view, critical to our understanding of everything that has happened since that pivotal decade; for while the wandering exiles from the Summer of Love (1967, for younger readers) have invaded every area of our nation's life in the Long March to a New Age, there is one area where they have conspicuously failed to make their presence felt, and that is industry.

There are many reasons for this; there was certainly a feeling at the time that industry was too dirty and demeaning an occupation for us beautiful people. Richard Branson is a notable exception, but the vast majority of those be-sandalled stalwarts who did try to move into the wealth-generating sector of our national life came up against the massed ranks of be-suited directors (otherwise known as the British Fighting Square).

In industry, the fierce collective of the Old Boys' network was at its most bellicose. Sixties' notions were anathema to these purple-faced class warriors. It was a Red Flag to a redneck; the limp-wristed, ganja-toting frontiersmen of the sixties didn't stand a chance. They were hacked to pieces on the shop floor before they could even rise to middle management.

The upshot of this bloody, unseen massacre was that arguably this century's most creative generation, along with its ideas, was excluded from precisely that quarter whence—with the advent of Thatcherism—was expected to emerge the cavalry that would help her overturn our country's headlong tumble into state-subsidised decadence.

This marginalisation of a generation and its ideas within the industrial sector is one of the most tragic and least publicised legacies of Mrs Thatcher and her pre-sixties cohorts behind whose "economic libertarianism" was actually a desperate urge to reimpose the sort of archaic and brutal status quo that has never been shaken off by our nation's boardrooms.

Charles M Guest
How Mill
Carlisle

Unforgiven

I am writing to thank Steve Platt for his article on the anti-racist march through Welling, south London, the weekend before last ("Or was it a police riot?" 22 October). I, too, was on that march, and found the reports and descriptions elsewhere of that Saturday's events entirely unrecognisable.

But I was also dismayed by how other some anti-racist groups, such as the Anti-Racist Alliance, appeared to have had a hand in the misrepresentation of a march made up of many varied "non-political" people. I admit that I was initially wary of going on the demonstration, partly because I heard ARA spokespeople like Marc Wadsworth on radio news condemning it beforehand and predicting violence—on the part of the marchers. I write as member of no other group, such as the Anti-Nazi League, but only as a woman who hardly ever attends demonstrations. On this occasion, however, it was—to use an apt cliché—time to stand up and be counted.

I could not believe the blanket, one-sided reporting of the march the following day; had I been somewhere else? Surely they were talking about an entirely different event? Neither could I believe it when I heard ARA spokespeople (Wadsworth, again) agreeing with the distortion. In this, I believe the ARA made it far easier for all concerned—with the exception of *NSS*—to blame the marchers for what was, essentially, caused by the police. I have never felt drawn to any of the sides involved in fighting over which anti-racist group is the only true one, but following the Welling march, I will find it difficult to forgive the ARA its behaviour.

Narinder Dhanoa
London W10

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Playground lesson

Linda Bellos (Letters, 22 October), Bernie Grant ("Reparation, not repatriation", 15 October), and everyone else concerned to combat the rise of racism in this country, may like to ponder the moral of the following little incident.

It was 1974, the first and, to date, the only time that a fascist party (the National Front) was permitted a party election broadcast on television. Next morning, at the East End school where I was then teaching, one of my third-year pupils approached me, looking very serious; they were quite right, these foreigners should not be allowed to take our jobs and houses. Very gently, I explained to him that the colour of his skin meant that he was one of those they were referring to. "But I'm British!" he indignantly replied. Quite right, son, I said, and don't let anyone ever tell you different. I hope he still believes it, wherever he is.

Frank Jackson
Harlow
Essex

Distracting point-scoring

It is a shame that A Sivanandan ("Race against time", 15 October) undermines his more serious points by accusing Labour of "capitulation to the Tories over the Asylum Act". We really must be mature enough for anti-racists to argue constructively with each other while maintaining a united front, rather than lapsing into this sort of gratuitous and destructive point-scoring. As it is, I must break briefly from the important parliamentary work in this area to refute his aside.

Havng spent many months on the floor of the House and in committee fighting the Asylum Bill line by line, this sort of thing is particularly annoying. The Labour members of the committee—Jeremy Corbyn, Bernie Grant, Max Madden, Barbara Roche, Mike Watts, John Fraser and Neil Gerrard—battled day in and day out for many months, alongside the pressure groups and organisations that represent immigrants and asylum-seekers. That work continues to this day.

The Labour Party is committed to creating a free and equal society in which all citizens, regardless of their colour, creed or ethnic origin, will enjoy equal rights. As a party we have a long and honourable record of opposition to race prejudice. That opposition to racism remains unequivocal. It is to eradicating racism, rather than sniping at allies, that our efforts will remain directed.

Graham Allen MP
Shadow Minister for Immigration
House of Commons
London SW1

THIS ENGLAND

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• Football hooligans could be cured by being made to wear proper hats. Good behaviour has all but disappeared since men stopped wearing them.
—Letter in the *Daily Mail*
(Ron Rubin)

• Former topless model and pop star Samantha Fox is to settle her £1 million legal row with her father out of court, it was revealed today. Samantha, aged 27, dropped the case after dad Pat, aged 48, agreed to pay her a "substantial amount". A spokesman for Samantha said: "There is no animosity now."
—*Yorkshire Evening Press*
(Hugh Bayley)

Partial balance

Angus Roxburgh of the BBC (Letters, 22 October) misrepresents my column about Boris Yeltsin ("The war against democracy", 8 October). I didn't suggest that my views "were shared by most Russians". I didn't suggest that members of the Russian parliament were "great upholders of democracy". I didn't write that parliament was "benign", nor that it provided "checks and balances". The only brush Roxburgh has with accuracy is the very last reference; and the notion of the parliament playing a balancing role, which was its legal right, was a quotation from Renfrey Clarke, a Russian socialist who distinguished himself by reporting from both sides, instead of from behind Boris Yelstin's militia.

Roxburgh says he doesn't understand why the word "reforms" should be in inverted commas. Well, for the same reason that "democracy" should be in inverted commas when it is espoused by budding dictators like Yeltsin. Certainly, Roxburgh's spirited defence of Yeltsin's "reforms", which he says are "according to basic economic laws" (whose laws?), leaves little doubt that BBC claims of "impartiality" and "balance" in its coverage of the former Soviet Union belong to the same Orwellian double-think as the ideological shorthand that so often passes for news.

John Pilger
London SW4

Just desserts

How naive of us all to have believed that English football hooligans were sullen, thick xenophobes, the authentic face of English nationalism, when all the time they are angry young men rebelling against their staid elders' suburban values ("Life as a hooligan", 22 October). Obviously, it follows that we Scots fans who don't cause trouble abroad are dullards who know our place. If so, why is it we vote against the Tories and England always votes for them?

The idea that racism isn't fashionable would be laughable if it were not so tragic. Remind me again, which party does councillor Derek Beackon represent, and who voted for him? Who likes the IRA? Certainly not the BNP, and for reasons similar to Porter and Hills' sons of Albion, in that they challenge English nationalism. And what's a "pseudo-loyalist"? Either you believe in the current constitutional system of an English-dominated United Kingdom, or you don't.

Belonging to a despised group can give rise to a "no one likes us, we don't care" myopic self-righteousness. Patently the Dutch, what with their decrepit stadium, lying policemen and hashish-selling coffee shops, brought trouble upon themselves. Presumably the 38 Italians killed at Heysel also had only themselves to blame.

The normal Scottish response, when reading yet another article by a "genuine" England fan about how this or that individual shouldn't have been coshed during *Italia 90*, or arrested in Sweden, or deported from Holland, is to shrug and think that they, too, got what they deserved. Not fair, is it?

Stephen Rainham
Hillhead
Glasgow

All in the memes

I fear *NSS* readers may be unable to reconstruct my arguments about religion from the very compressed account of them given in the conclusion of Pat Coyne's report (Dielectrics, 15 October). My point is that it is no more valid to argue (as sociobiologists do) that religion is to be understood in non-religious terms than it is to argue that birds' feathers have no connection with flight because one can find reasons for birds to have feathers (such as the heat insulation they provide) that have nothing to do with flight.

There was, as Coyne noted, opposition to the invocation in the course of my argument of a division of religion into pathological and

Min Cooper

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non-pathological varieties. Since scientists themselves distinguish between genuine science and pathological variants, should they not allow that religious people might be able to make a similar differentiation in the case of religion?

Vaneechoutte's "meme" theory of religion fails to take into consideration religious experience, which is frequently spontaneous, rather than the direct consequence of religious indoctrination as the meme theory would require. His well-argued attempt to dispose of a purely religious or spiritual side of life by characterising these as particular memes must, accordingly, be considered inadequate.

Professor Brian Josephson
Department of Physics
University of Cambridge

Let's take the high road

I agree with the substance of your editorial on defence ("Sense about defence", 22 October), except for the final paragraph that conflates the views of all Labour MPs with that of the position on defence put forward by the defence front-bench team.

In the two-day debate last week on the 1993 defence estimates, I spoke and voted against the government proposals to tinker on the fringes of the vast £24.5 billion military budget, but which do nothing to promote a positive peace dividend.

I also put together early day motion No 2445, seeking to gather support for the party conference resolutions that were far more radical and constructive than the policies promoted from the front bench. The text of the motion is: "That this House welcomes the overwhelming vote at the Labour Party conference calling for United Kingdom defence spending to be reduced to the average level of other western European countries, allied to constructive plans for defence diversification, arms conversion and the transfer of the savings made to economic and social priorities by investment in job creation and economic development and the restructuring of Britain's crumbling infrastructure; recognises the importance of the call for making retraining of the defence sector workforce a priority; applauds the conference majority decision calling for the immediate scrapping of the Trident submarine and weapons programme as an essential step towards the elimination of nuclear weapons worldwide . . . and therefore calls upon Her Majesty's Government to support the cancellation of the Trident programme and to plan the investment of resources saved into job creation and industrial innovation in the civil economy."

It had gained the support of 40 MPs by the end of the first week, and I expect more Labour MPs to back it. As I said during the defence debate, whether we are addressing the export of arms, the so-called peace dividend, the non-proliferation treaty, the defence estimates or the Maastricht treaty, we are spending too much effort, imagination, creativity and finance in developing more and more sophisticated wasy of destroying life, when we should be trying to find ways of preserving it—a life of dignity and hope in which our children and grandchildren have the opportunity to use their truly wonderful talents.

That is surely what the Labour movement is about. That is what has attracted generations of people to our cause. If we take that road, we shall have a glorious future. If we fail, we shall be little more that a Social Democratic Party mark II.

Llewellyn Smith MP and MEP
House of Commons
London SW1

Maternity matters

If American feminists are so obsessed with sex and making huge amounts from their writings ("Less sex please: we're British", 22 October), it is no wonder that American women have only just been granted unpaid maternity leave.

Ann Farmer
Woodford Green
Essex

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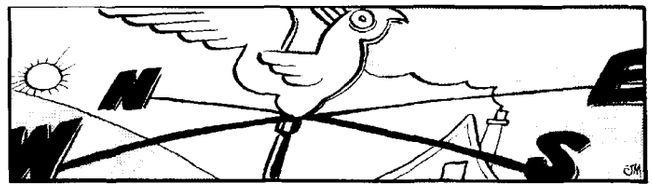

Colin Ward ponders the lessons of incinerating the documents

In the chaos of Germany in 1919, one revolutionary, Max Holz, became famous through his slogan "Incinerate the documents". His merry band would seize the council offices of small towns, to make a bonfire of the records of land tenure, confident that they were striking a mortal blow at the evil of private ownership of land.

Subsequently, everybody smiled at this simple ideology with the same lofty superiority that Malcolm Muggeridge applied to the beliefs of his parents. A century ago, they were among the founders of the Croydon Brotherhood, attempting, as Dennis Hardy puts it in his study of 19th-century alternative communities, "to synthesise Tolstoyan philosophy with a growing English sympathy for a notion of brotherhood and peaceful revolution". With some Russian exiles, they founded a colony at Purleigh in Essex, which collapsed in dissension, leaving behind only vague recollections of "Russian anarchists who once lived on the hill".

Undismayed, the brothers and sisters from Croydon pooled their resources and for £450 bought 40 acres of infertile land with a cottage on a hillside near Stroud, to lead a self-sufficient simple life together. Mr and Mrs Muggeridge used to take young Malcolm on visits to sample Whiteway, a "Cotswold Garden of Eden". Half a century later, in the lucrative world-weary phase of his life, he returned with a TV crew to recall his socialist childhood, telling the camera in 1966: "As a child I observed with wonder their efforts to dispense with money, matrimony and sometimes clothes. I note today with some wistfulness their resumption of all three." At the time, the 114 adults living in the 66 houses at Whiteway dismissed his film as an attempt "to pull Whiteway to pieces", but he missed the most significant thing about the place. Twenty years before Max Holz, they resolved to incinerate the documents, and it worked.

Now, in good time for the centenary in 1998, a resident has told the whole story in *Whiteway Colony: the social history of a Tolstoyan community* by Joy Thacker (£13.95 plus £1.50 p&p, from the author at Fairhaven, Whiteway, Stroud, Glos GL6 7EP). It's a homespun tale in a handsome volume of 220 pages with 132 pictures, and the author argues that "the equality craved by those early socialist settlers has survived completely", because the pioneers, having received the title-deeds to the land, "smeared [the papers] with paraffin and burnt them". The land belongs to no one and, consequently, to everyone. Only the houses on it can be bought and sold, so that those wishing to live there must apply to the monthly meeting and agree to "keep alive the bond of unity and common responsibilities, and principle of possession of land for use only".

A pig-headed person once sought to ignore this and took the case to the Land Tribunal in London. The court ruled that the colonists were right and were using a form of tenure dating from 1200 AD. Those happy settlers began with wooden sheds with corrugated-iron roofs. Their successors have fully serviced homes in leafy seclusion.

Wouldn't it be marvellous, in the current crisis of rural housing, to win the consent of authority for a waiving of the planning legislation and the building regulations (which didn't exist for the Whiteway pioneers), and to buy at the agricultural valuation 40 acres of some prairie-farmer's set-aside land in time to celebrate the Whiteway centenary with a ceremonial incineration of the documents?

It won't happen, not through any lack of Tolstoyan anarchists (the old buses of the New Age Travellers are crewed by them), nor for lack of philanthropists to contribute to the purchase, but because you can only buck the regulatory system if you're rich, because we are all Nimbys now, and because of the misanthropy of the heritage lobby, which loves the entire natural world except fellow humans.

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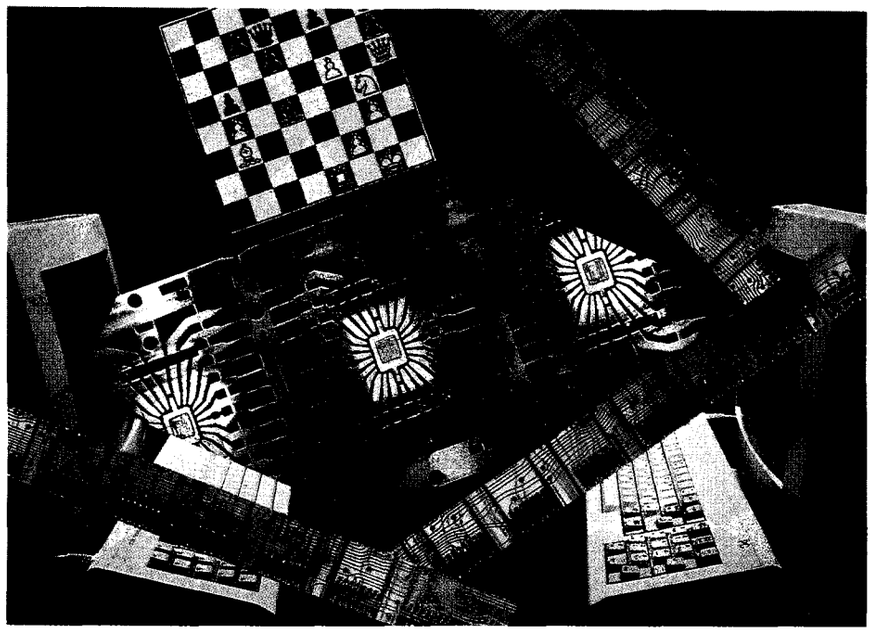

Could machines ever think like human beings? And is there any test which might satisfy us that they could? **Janet Vaux** looks at the history of artificial intelligence

Intelligence tests

The idea that machines may think seems absurd and frightening. Yet from time to time, someone—usually a professor in artificial intelligence, or cognitive science or neural networks—tells us that machines will indeed think within five, or 50 or 500 hundred years. The professor most recently to make such a claim is Kevin Warwick, a cyberneticist from Reading University, who has suggested that machines that are more intelligent than humans will be built within the lifetime of our children.

The philosopher John Searle pointed out in 1984, when he gave the Reith Lectures, that some believers in artificial intelligence (AI) claim not only that machines will think, but that machines already do think. Searle said: "My all-time favourite in the literature of exaggerated claims on behalf of the digital computer is from John McCarthy, the inventor of the term 'artificial intelligence'. McCarthy says: 'Even machines as simple as thermostats can be said to have beliefs.' . . . I admire McCarthy's courage. I once asked him: 'What beliefs does your thermostat have?' And he said: 'My thermostat has three beliefs—it's too hot in here, it's too cold in here, and it's just right in here.'" (*Minds, Brains and Science*, BBC, 1984.)

How absurd. On the other hand, that's not a bad way to explain the function of a thermostat; perhaps viewing machines as intelligent can sometimes help us to understand what they do. Searle was addressing the question "Can machines think?" from within a philosophical tradition where the proper response is to ask: what do we mean by knowledge? How do we talk about it? From Searle's point of view, the problem with McCarthy's claim is that it is *non-metaphorical*. McCarthy is not just saying, "This is a useful way of looking at information processing machines"; he is saying, "They literally think, like we do." Searle argues that this flies in the face of what we mean by thinking, and particularly what we mean by "understanding". And if language constructs our world, how can we get outside language to change the meaning of "thinking" or of "understanding"?

One answer that AI people sometimes give to this is that when machines think we shall be happy to talk about them as thinking. Or, more accurately, that at some point in the development of computers we shall start to speak of machines as intelligent. Alan Turing made this point in a paper called "Computing Machinery and Intelligence" published in the journal *Mind* in 1950: "The original question, 'Can machines think?' I believe to be too meaningless to deserve discussion. Nevertheless I believe that at the end of the century the use of words and general educated opinion will have altered so much that one will be able to speak of machines thinking without expecting to be contradicted."

We are now less than ten years from the turn of the century, and in a way Turing is right. We do happily talk about "intelligent" machines. For example, we distinguish "intelligent" from "dumb" terminals in a computer system, depending on whether a terminal has its own computing functions, over and above those of the main computer. To the makers and users of machine tools "intelligent machines" mean computer-controlled machines. But this has not settled the debate; these "intelligent" terminals and machine tools are somehow not "really intelligent".

How will we know when machines have become really intelligent; or, if you prefer, when will we acknowledge that they are really intelligent? Perhaps when they start whingeing about it, like the intelligent toaster in the TV series *Red Dwarf*, which is only ever asked to make the toast.

The argument about the possibility of machines thinking has always been accompanied by some rule-of-thumb indicators about the practical implications of machine intelligence. For example, when AI researchers started constructing chess-playing systems they argued that, because machines can be intelligent in the same way as humans, chess-playing systems would one day be able to take on chess professionals, masters and maybe even grandmasters. Their opponents tended to accept this argument, and denied that computers would ever be that good at chess, because machines would not play chess in the same way as humans.

The irony is that time (so far) has proved both sides right, or perhaps both wrong. In December 1989, the chess system Deep Thought, built at Carnegie Mellon University, convincingly beat international master David Levy in three straight sets. However, Deep Thought is a rather conventional computer system. At the time of the match with Levy, it included a refined version of a specialised chess search algorithm; but it didn't incorporate the most advanced AI work, for example trying to mimic the way human players perceive chess positions in "chunks". Deep Thought's main weapon was its processing speed on customised hardware.

"Real intelligence" seems to be as elusive as the rainbow's end. If Deep Thought is not "intelligent", perhaps there is nothing a machine can do that we shall be prepared to recognise as "thinking". There is an alternative to this view: we can say with John McCarthy that machines already think, that a thermostat has three ideas. However, this also changes nothing. Why should we move from a view that machines are already thinking to the view that one day they will be more intelligent than us?

This phenomenon that "nothing counts" as intelligence has been remarked on with some frustration by AI researchers (though they tend to be less concerned with the phenomenon of everything counting). In their book *The Creative Computer*, Donald Michie (a British pioneer of AI) and Rory Johnston comment: "There appears to be a feeling that if one understands how something works, it is not intelligent. This leads to the idea coined by Larry Tesler that, 'artificial intelligence is

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whatever hasn't been done yet', placing AI workers in a 'no-win situation'."

Some readers may be wondering why I have not so far mentioned the Turing test, which is supposed to tell us when computers may be regarded as intelligent. This test, which Turing proposed in the 1950 paper mentioned earlier, involves a sort of parlour game whereby a computer has to fool an adjudicator into thinking it is human during five minutes of general conversation. The reason I haven't mentioned this test is that it does not seem particularly relevant, because it does not unblock the no-win (or no-lose) situation. If we don't consider Deep Thought an intelligent chess player, why should we suddenly attribute intelligence to a system that is certified as passing the Turing test? Likewise, if we already consider thermostats intelligent, what is the additional milestone that the Turing tested machine has passed?

So what is there to be afraid of? Marvin Minsky of MIT perhaps captured some of our most fantastic worries when he suggested that the next generation of computers will be so intelligent that we shall "be lucky if they are willing to keep us around the house as household pets". Minsky is apparently in favour of this scenario, although he has something of a reputation for making provocative statements (such as referring to humans as "meat machines"). However, as Deep Thought illustrates, it doesn't take an intelligent computer to perform a task that requires intelligence in humans; dumb computers can do that already. Pocket calculators are another example. One underlying theme of the claims by the artificial intelligentsia has been that humans and machines ultimately think in the same way. Yet one of the practical applications of AI research lies in bridging the gap between the way people think and the way machines think. Because part of the point of AI research is to try to mimic the way that people think, AI systems can provide intelligent interfaces between people and machines. Fairly simple "expert systems", for example, are used to monitor complex industrial machinery and provide an early warning of faults, along with likely causes and possible remedies.

Such systems, incidentally, are an example of computer programs that involve AI, but wouldn't be regarded as "really intelligent" (perhaps, following Tesler's rule, because they can be done). AI programming techniques, which can trace their history to the researchers of the 1950s and 1960s, who were seeking the philosopher's stone of intelligence, now constitute one element in the tools available to designers of computer systems. AI programming remains a minority art, but is often used on particularly demanding applications (for example, to help in planning airline schedules). It has its own history, its own programming style and its own way of representing data and procedures; but for all that, it's difficult to define exactly what it amounts to. To say it involves "intelligence" does not provide a defining description.

Janet Vaux is a freelance writer specialising in artificial intelligence

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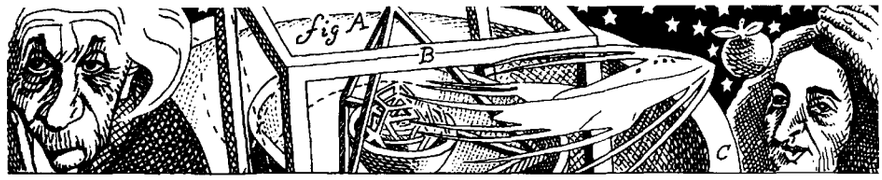

Privatisation of government research poses ethical as well as financial problems, says **Pat Coyne**

Thesis or antithesis? The corollary of our esteemed Prime Minister's effortless assumption into the realms of the banal—warm beer, cycling spinsters, more comfort stops on motorways and the like—is a heedless jettisoning of those intellectual traditions that the state, despite all attempts to the contrary, has managed to preserve. The cry, "The Philistines are coming", echoes through the halls and across the stages of every subsidised theatre, opera house and art gallery in the country.

Do we feel sorry for them? That depends. For some, the sight of the sixties generation, fuller now of figure and bank balance, comfortably ensconced in every sinecure in the land, stretching out the hand for ever more subsidies, while damning those who dole them out, looks like little more than the realisation of the fantasies of every Maoist and flower child. A taste of market discipline is what they need. For others, these institutions remain the last bastions of unprivatised free thought.

Less noticed, but no less forcefully, the same arguments can be heard in every science faculty, institution and laboratory in the land. In the fifties and sixties, Britain won more Nobel prizes than the rest of Europe combined. British scientists vied with Americans at the top of citation indexes (the number of times important papers are cited in other works) in virtually every major scientific field. Now Britain ranks behind Germany in most fields, and behind Japan in several, and the graphs are diverging as theirs point upwards and ours down.

The causes are many, but easily the biggest single reason for the decline is lack of resources, exacerbated by a growing reluctance of government to sponsor research. We spend less on science than most comparable nations and, crucially, much of that research has been on military applications, where the benefits both intellectually and industrially are much less. Military research has creamed off funds, drained off precious trained scientists, and allowed companies like GEC to grow fat on the proceeds, relieving them of any necessity to enter more competitive fields such as electronics, where British performance has been lamentable.

Everywhere the "if it moves, privatise it" mentality prevails. The recent white paper on the future of British science championed "Foresight", the idea that what is left of publicly funded research should be more "relevant"—that is, market oriented.

The white paper also mooted the privatision of most of the country's 25 government research establishments. These range from well-known defence agencies such the Atomic Weapons Establishment at Aldermaston and the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down, through the Patent Office and the Meteorological Office to the Forensic Science Service and the National Resources Institute. Together, these employ 34,400 scientists and have a turnover of more than £1.5 billion.

The threat has prompted the Institution of Professionals, Managers and Specialists, the union to which most government scientists belong, to sponsor a "Keep Science for the People" campaign. The concerns of the IPMS—and of many more people besides—are at least threefold. First, that much basic and applied research will simply be abandoned, given British industry's traditional reluctance to invest in R&D. Second, that expensively trained scientific staff will be unemployed or else employed in areas where their skills will not be put to good use. That matters. Britain has fewer scientifically trained staff in senior management than any comparable company, and recent research by the Economic and Social Science Research Council (*The Role of Scientists in Technological Change*, 1993) indicated that companies with graduate scientists and engineers at senior levels outperformed those without.

Third, the fear is that there will be increasing conflicts of interest between commercial necessity and the regulatory functions with which many of these establishments are charged. The Building Research Establishment, for example, includes the Fire Research Station, an organisation so disliked by the industry it regulates that it was once banned from a government exhibition stand at a furniture fair in Birmingham's National Exhibition Centre. What hope of that sort of fearlessness once the BRE has to depend on those furniture firms for its revenues?

Then there is the Patent Office. Patents can be worth millions—sometimes, like Glaxo's Zantac, the world's best selling anti-ulcer drug, billions. Who will believe that a privatised Patent Office will be entirely immune from the commercial pressures that this sort of money generates? Certainly concern has already been expressed by the Chartered Institute of Patent Agents, whose members are the main users of the Office, and by MPs from all parties. Who or what is going to ensure the objectivity of patent assessment? Or will it be not so much who guards, but who buys, the guardians?

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Bonnet double: Holly Hunter and Anna Paquin

Jane Campion's "The Piano" deserves its status as an instant classic. **Jonathan Romney** unravels the chords in her attempt to create a "Victorian" film

Cinema appassionata

Judging by the praise showered on *The Piano* since its unveiling at Cannes this year, you would think its director, Jane Campion, had reinvented cinema. Well, she has certainly rediscovered the range of its potential, and the possibility that a film might be able to pack a complex and serious narrative thrill. It wears its seriousness more elegantly than any recent film, and if it turns out to be a popular success it should knock over some long-entrenched barriers between mainstream and "art" cinema. If nothing else, I'll bet it will be the decade's most written-about film on film-studies courses. It's the sort of work that has critics cursing the very idea of a word limit.

The Piano (on general release from 29 October) bears obvious comparison with *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, John Fowles' attempt to anatomise Victorian mores from the standpoint of late 20th-century irony. Campion doesn't have a particular Victorian art form in her optic, in the way that Fowles was able to graft his novel directly onto Victorian fiction. She doesn't have the option of direct pastiche, but she does create a curious double perspective.

While inventing a new way for film to imagine the Victorian era, she also imagines what sort of textures and perspectives a fully blown Victorian cinema might have had. The idea of Victorian cinema persists, ghost-like, through this 1990s film, sometimes in little echoes of Victorian portrait photography or allusions to Lotte Reiniger's shadow-play animations of the 1920s. We're not asked to adopt an ironic modern perspective on a past era, nor to imagine it as a caricatural analogy of present times (as with Peter Greenaway's grotesque 17th century in *The Baby of Macon*). There's none of the distancing that comes with irony or with the Merchant-Ivory school of costume spectacle. Campion doesn't give us theme-park history.

We're invited instead to inhabit this film's world, but we're constantly aware that it's barely habitable—morally, and literally. The moment we see Holly Hunter in her frills and bustle gird her skirts for a trudge through the New Zealand mud, we realise that the film's characters are as much out of place in this universe as we are.

Hunter plays Ada, a mute Scottish woman who, in the last century, is sent to a remote part of New Zealand with her young daughter Flora (Anna Paquin) to be married to Stewart, a landowner (Sam Neill). She leaves behind her what is presumably a scandalous reputation. That, like the rest of Ada's life, is passed over in absolute silence, her own and others'. And she takes with her the beloved piano which, along with Flora, her interpreter, is effectively her voice. That monolithic embodiment of her self and her desire is initially left behind by Stewart on the beach, and then becomes an object of trade between him and Baines (Harvey Keitel), the estate manager. Baines asks for piano lessons from her, which then accelerates into a more openly sexual barter, with Ada playing for higher stakes.

What immediately occurs to you is just how much Campion has taken on. Many directors would either have opted for a story of repressed colonial passions and made the location an unobtrusive backdrop; or have let the story hang, and staked all on the recreation of a Victorian New Zealand outpost: a little bastion of high collars, lockets and Biblical bile, awash in a sea of mossy trunks and quasi-aquatic undergrowth.

Campion goes for both, and the world she sets her drama in has the most tangibly uncomfortable atmosphere. The photographer, Stuart Dryburgh, and the production director, Andrew McAlpine, contrive an extraordinary contrast between the dessicated feel of musty sepia and a malevolently intense effect of seawater and forest chlorophyll.

The film's visual power is all the greater because of the way Campion dares to use silence as a language. Ada never utters a word throughout, but she doesn't simply *not speak*. She's not just a silent screen on which the men around her project their desires (though God knows they do). Rather, she communicates with silence—with sign language and with a ferociously communicative system of looks. Hunter makes a frighteningly eloquent vehicle for the generic "flashing eyes" of Romantic fiction.

Ada's silent voice finds an even more unsettling incarnation in young Flora, who is at once her ward and her keeper. The voice-over we hear at first is in the piping sing-song voice of a Scottish child. This is Ada's inner voice, barely distinguishable from Flora's. The child acts as her mother's double (they dress alike in matching bonnets and skirts) or

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even as her libido, embodied and given its own anarchic drift.

At one point, in an amateur performance of *Bluebeard*—an ironic rehearsal of Ada's own situation—Flora is got up as an angel. It's a wonderfully wry play on Victorian notions of childhood, virtue and purity. By making an angel of the child, the matrons around her desperately attempt to have her incarnate the virtue her mother is seen to have lost. But once Flora comes to act out the part of her mother's "good conscience", the effect is cruel and disastrous.

The Piano does something extremely rare in the way it allows its historical furnishings to have meaning, rather than just tell you where you are. The temptation would be to caricature the costumes, just as Baines' Maoris make their own parodic use of stovepipe hats and bustles. Instead, Campion uses them literally, but accentuates their use to draw out their symbolic possibilities.

Flora's and Ada's bonnets double each other, surrounding their heads like the frames of cameo portraits or, from the side, appearing like little megaphones, amplifying silence. Ada's skirts are used as a shelter on the beach, and later become improbably eroticised as a frame through which Baines peers at her legs.

Later, Campion rediscovers the long-forgotten erotic possibilities that unite clothing and cinema. She stresses the taboo delight in looking, which was an absolute in the Victorian era and was soon after mobilised as a key component in early cinema. The moment at which Baines discovers a small hole in Ada's stocking is far more shocking, in its breaching of a barrier, than the more explicit sex that follows. When it does follow, and when other characters spy on it, we begin to understand how people must have reacted to What-the-Butler-Saw machines.

The Victorian object of delight and of scandal in the film is not so much sex itself as women's knowledge of sex. Ada, as no one can forget, knows sex, and Flora is the constant reminder of that fact. Her silence on the matter is most shocking of all.

No one can bear the fact that Ada might have a secret knowledge and a secret past. Hers is an erotic silence indeed. Her piano playing is explicitly seen as a sexual force. As Stewart's frosty Aunt Morag comments with a shudder, "Her playing is like a mood that passes into you."

The Piano pretty much passes into you with the same mysterious charm: endlessly eloquent and suggestive, but in its silences as much as in its exceptionally rich discourse of themes and images. There's so much going on that you can't help wondering how much of its melody is evading you. You just have to keep listening.

The film is, of course, an open invitation for critics to come up with the most forced musical analogies imaginable. But it does remind you that if a film *is* a piano, then most cinema today is content to hammer away at the same three chords when there's a whole keyboard at its disposal. In which case, this is the most eloquent concerto-manifesto that one could have hoped for.

Eno's patent remedy: the sound doctor prescribes a dose of Ambient

Mark Prendergast follows the remarkable rise of Ambient music

Background story

In the world of popular culture, the lexicon of acceptable terms and phrases changes like a merry-go-round. Take the word "Ambient", for example. Today, it is the hippest word in pop, embracing a panoply of styles that rely on atmosphere and repetition. In the past, it was the dirtiest word in pop: an automatic put-down for any music that strayed outside the hip conventions of the music press. Now the same papers can proclaim that: "Ambient music is the classical music of the future."

Or is it? That quotation, from an *NME* feature in June, is par for the course these days. Rock and roll has been displaced from its prominent place as a transitional nirvana for youth by funk, soul, dance, groove and, of course, Club. The word "House" has been superseded by sophistication, and the most sophisticated listen to Ambient.

A dictionary definition would define Ambient as: that which encompasses, the environment, surrounding influence or atmosphere. But does a dance beat interluded by a few squeaky sounds and washy synthesizer effects add up to a new kind of music?

It was Brian Eno, in 1978, who allied the word Ambient to popular music. In his manifesto on the *Music For Airports*, Eno described 1950s Muzak as lightweight tunes arranged in a derivative manner. Obviously thinking of lounge-bar Muzak, Eno thought it stripped away all sense of thought and uncertainty to leave something nice and innocuous. In retrospect, it's the darkness in Eno's own music that makes it worthwhile, and the calm acceptance of good and bad in life that wills its continued popularity.

Later, Eno would note that modern pop compressed sounds (as in obvious surreal classics such as the Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds*) but that studio-made music could divorce foreground from background. In an essay written for the CD issue of Ambient 4 (*On Land*) in 1986, Eno discussed the sonic landscape of the listener, the distance between the sounds in a recording, and how widening the gap between note clusters would redefine aural space. His reference to recording natural sounds in Ghana echoed the work of Steve Reich, and would later be echoed in the live acoustic work of the KLF.

This kind of precision has allowed Eno to become the most plausible analyst of Ambience. But the story is much bigger than he. New Age Music in the 1980s *seemed* to take off from Eno. People became confused and thought that all modern instrumental music was New Age. In the US, classical, jazz, Eno and much else got thrown into the same marketing trend. In Britain, New Age superseded the term Ambient as the best insult to throw at non-rock music.

Nobody could define it. Nobody could un-

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derstand why so many pretty instrumental albums were making millions of dollars in the States. It was termed "hot tub music" or "wallpaper sound". In a word, it was empty.

New Age, in reality, was yuppie music made for overworked climbers who wanted a harmless background sound as they got on with their busy lives. It was harmless light stuff with no dark tones. Notes and sounds were not prominent or separate, as with Eno. It just washed over you. To place the likes of Gorecki, Tangerine Dream, Eno or Mike Oldfield under this moniker (as Tower Records still does) displays ignorance at a very profound level.

But if good sounds weren't being made by the Windham Hill crowd of New Age musicians, better ones came from Klaus Schulze. So the yuppie could either waste money or buy a piece of musical history. Today, the importance of sound—its organisation and its innovations—has become a crucial selling point. Hundreds of thousands are willing to brush away prejudice to get their hands on the best Ambient recordings.

But why? Well, the old story of rave culture's overdose on fast beats is part of the reason. So is the rise of "chill out" music from KLF or the Orb, and its aftermath. Now the Future Sound of London, Aphex Twin, Sven Vath, Mixmaster Morris and dozens of other DJs make instrumental records within the dance scene. Is this Ambient?

Some of it is. But a lot is so littered with beats and cluttered sound that it falls outside the definition. Moreover, much of it reminds you of the old New Age stuff, mixed to a fairly distant kind of House. Again, the term has been hijacked for commercial reasons.

The rise of Ambient House has made many listeners unfetter the word from its negative connotations. According to Dave Cawley at Fat Cat Records (London's only true Ambient outlet), "The demand is incessant. Without a doubt people now want quality background music which is not specifically related to drugs or club music. Dance people are now going back and learning about it, going back to Eno, Kraftwerk, Steve Hillage. Every time we get the CDs in they are just snapped up."

So Club music is making people learn a bit of history. According to Sonic Boom Kember (formerly of Spacemen 3 and now of Spectrum), his droney Ambient music is "a mixture of American psychedelia and Minimalism inspired by both the Velvet Underground and John Cage. When I heard an Eno record, I really only understood it when it was over."

Changing our perceptions of time and space has been a feature of 20th-century music since Debussy. Erik Satie invented environmental music, Pierre Schaeffer and Stockhausen allied it to electronics. The onset of the sophisticated recording studio and the synth led to Ambience as a way of life for the likes of the Grateful Dead and Pink Floyd.

Synth music in its purest form reached its zenith with the German bands of the 1970s—Tangerine Dream, Can, Ashra, Cluster, Kraftwerk and their spin-offs. It is these electronic pioneers that most influence today's Ambient. A new compilation simply called "Ambient" on Virgin highlights the connection.

Ambient could perhaps be seen as the music of the 21st-century. The contents of a new Ambient House compilation, *Apollo*, do sound as if they come from some science-fiction future: a J G Ballard landscape of bright chrome and irradiated skies, with the sounds magically conjured from a cube like that on Altair 4 in the film *Forbidden Planet*.

Eno has often talked of creating a music of the future. According to Pete Namlook of Sequential, a celebrated German DJ who sells Ambient mixes on his Fax label, "It's gonna be the biggest musical movement because it's music for everybody. Everything is open. Everything is possible."

Ambient listening

1. *Ambient 152mins 33secs* (Virgin): essential twin CD with tracks from Tangerine Dream, Ashra, Robert Fripp, Harold Budd etc. All tracks edited and phased together!
2. *Apollo—File Under Ambient* (R & S): the most accessible new Ambient House.
3. *Applied Rhythmic Technology—The Philosophy of Sound & Machines* (Split Level): a showcase of the new British electronic music.
4. *Sven Vath—Accident in Paradise* (WEA): major-label Ambient dance music influenced by the instrumental works of Ryuichi Sakamoto, Peter Gabriel and of course Eno.
5. *Brian Eno 1* (Virgin): three-CD boxed set personally remastered by Eno to cover his ground-breaking instrumental innovations from 1975 to the present.
6. General: anything by The Orb, mid-period Pink Floyd; Ashra; Klaus Schulze; Tangerine Dream; Kraftwerk; Steve Hillage; Terry Riley; Philip Glass; David Sylvian.

The Brian Eno boxed set is released on Virgin on 29 October. Fat Cat Records is at 14 Monmouth Street, London WC2 9HB

Gillian Ayres: "Altair", 1989-90

Sue Hubbard basks in the dazzling Indian summer of Gillian Ayres

Rainbow warrior

Brick Lane is filled with the smell of spices. Cumin and coriander float from the curry houses, wafting past the sari shops and the sweet emporiums. What more appropriate setting could be imagined for Gillian Ayres' latest exhibition, *An Indian Summer*, than Atlantis in the heart of the East End: a new gallery space above an artists' supplies warehouse, adjacent to the beautiful early 19th-century Truman brewery?

In 1968, Ayres was one of ten artists in the British Council's selection for the First Triennale-India in New Delhi. In 1991, she was the sole representative and won the gold medal. It was an inspired choice. India could have been made for Ayres. Full of generous sensuality, her work perfectly captures the promiscuous eroticism of colour offered by that cultural palimpsest.

In Rajasthan, she saw temples and frescoes and was much taken with the colours of the local costumes. In Jaipur, she had a temporary studio where she worked with fervour, often until dark. A shy and solitary painter, more used to the wilds of Cornwall, she frequently found herself surrounded by curious villagers. "I would find groups hovering in the doorway watching. At one point, I had to explain that the canvas I had just primed wasn't the painting, only the beginning!"

She loved the women's bright saris, the

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citric greens, cerises and ochres: "Like Piero della Francesca". "I went for the crude stuff rather than the art," she adds self-mockingly, "the tinsel and bright garlands tied to lorries, the awnings, cloth and spices in the markets".

And this is what she has brought back. The smell, the hubbub of India. In *Helios* she has caught not only the heat and light, but in her moving serpentine line, the "shape" of the noise and the bustle of Indian life. Ayres has always had a feel for the decorative and the exotic, which she owes to Matisse. Her intricate patterning transforms the kaleidoscope of visual images and makes them her own: the stripes painted on temples, the jewel-like confections on sweet stalls, the rich embroidered textiles and the patterned mirror-work cloth, which is the most evident influence in *Phaeton*.

These paintings exude energy. She has always been a physical painter. Early on, after her discovery of Jackson Pollock, she painted flat on the floor, then moved to painting upright: large canvases that could be covered only by running up ladders (which she continues to do, though now in her sixties). One senses the bodily connection in all her work: the span of an outstretched arm, the track of her fingers left in the paint, like a child enjoying the squidgy feel of the oils. Some areas are so thick that they take several years to dry.

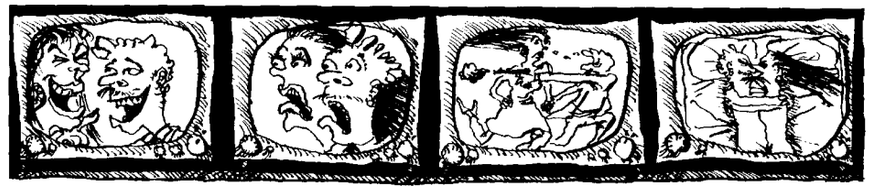
The Indian experience led to a heightened palette and a more deliberate use of black, as in *Indian Summer*. Black edges the scarlet swirls, the yellow zig-zags, the pink and blue stars like lead surrounding a cathedral's stained-glass window. India also resulted in the most literal work she has done for years, *Makar Sankranti*. During her time in Jaipur there was a kite festival. The bright hand-made kites were released spinning through the city to land on rooftops and trees. Seduced by their boiled-sweet colours, she collected as many as she could to make an instant collage. The transience of the event (and of life) is symbolised by the fact that the home-made dyes are already beginning to fade.

Like Bridget Riley and Elisabeth Frink, Gillian Ayres belongs to a generation of women artists whose formative years pre-dated contemporary feminist debate. Their work reveals little of their gender. To survive in the male-dominated art scene of the 1950s and 1960s, they simply had to work like hell and be one of the best.

There were no supportive networks of women painters, no shows interested in womens' issues. Ayres found her freedom in abstraction and has acquired the languorous dexterity to use it to her own ends. There is a constant tension, a moving towards and then a flirtatious pulling back from the figurative. Flowers, petals and scented gardens are suggested, then tossed aside, encompassed by her real concern: the abstract rhythm of the work. Ayres paints above all for herself, against the postmodernist flow. She paints obsessively, full of verve, ebullience and a seemingly inexhaustible enthusiasm for both art and life.

"An Indian Summer": Atlantis Galleries, 146 Brick Lane, London E1, to 28 November

TELEVISION



Patricia Holland is glad that the sharp edge of Channel 4 still gives people—not pros or punters—a voice on TV

In a week when television and newspapers have been re-running *Margaret Thatcher* with the mixture of nostalgia and delighted horror that comes from a slightly suspect cult movie, it's something of a relief to turn to *Critical Eye* on Channel 4 (Thursdays). It deals with the same issues but marches to a very different drum.

The life and times of Channel 4 have been largely those of the Thatcher years, and its culture has adjusted accordingly. *Critical Eye* could be seen either as an after-echo—a memory of the channel's earlier days—or as a reasssuring sign of its continued commitment to diversity. The current season has included *The Women of 10 Downing Street*, on Punjabi women strikers in Smethwick, *Poland PLC*, which compared the free-market economy in Poland, Brazil and Britain, and *Deadly Bliss*, a terrifying view of the effect of crack in New York. Next week (on 4 November) comes *Between Times*: richly visual and cerebral, it nags at the dilemmas of people whose life-long commitment to socialism has left them with no clear-cut vision.

Although the series can feel like a residue of 1970s radicalism—the imagery of raised fists and chanting demonstrators on one hand, the Brechtian use of metaphor and aphorism on the other—what makes these programmes different is the commitment to "independence. "We aim to support people who feel strongly about something," says the commissioning editor Alan Fountain; "We don't try to impose particular forms." The result is a space for non-professional values in an increasingly cynical media climate.

Many of the programme-makers have come out of the film and video workshops of the early 1980s, and have kept that less rigid approach to production schedules and ways of assessing quality. They aim, however imperfectly, to be authors of their own programmes, not simply to facilitate personalities with known audience appeal.

Such a challenge to professionalism is more profound than the newer and trendier *Video Diary* mode, in which people who have never made a film before are invited to take up a camera. Nor is it quite like access television, which allows those with an axe to grind to plead their cause. *Critical Eye* and the other documentaries commissioned by Alan Fountain's unit occupy a domain long staked out by independent film-makers anxious to work to their own rules. Descendants of the Film and Photo League of the 1930s, their campaigning helped shape Channel 4 itself.

Those who feel strongly about something will often find ways to start filming, commissioned or no. *Between Times* began in this way, when director Marc Karlin documented the early days of the scheme to buy the Thurcroft Colliery. Miners raised half a million pounds from their redundancy money to rescue the pit and run it under their own management. It was an act of faith and renewal which, in the event, proved to be totally inappropriate to the climate of the times.

Contrary to the conventional TV wisdom of these hard and knowing days, *Between Times* does not personalise. It does not set out to tell the miners' story. It is unashamedly a film about ideas, enclosing its debate with allusive imagery—especially the contradictory visions of the devastated pit with its crumpled girders and an artificially idyllic "community garden" through which a particularly oily snake is winding.

The Thurcroft miners exemplify the heroic view of socialist history—battered and undermined by Thatcher's Britain, but with ideals of community, equality and humanity still strong. But the film's argument suggests that such mesmerising myths should be put aside. It points to the intimate detail of people's lives, the smallness of their aspirations. Its alternative vision is of Northern College, the stately home that offers Trade Unionists the peace and the space to study.

Turning your back on the political and economic in favour of self-improvement is a move that would delight Rupert Murdoch, who wrote in 1989 that "physical resources will decline in importance, to be replaced by information technology which will open new vistas for human imagination". Compare *Between Times*: "Political systems can't inspire so all we're left with is ourselves. We must incorporate change—not fix meanings."

The programme claims that history, finally, has no meaning. Its seductive visual metaphor is the beautiful Buddhist work of art which—contrary to everything Lord Clark said—is made in order to be swept away.

If the defeated miners of Thurcroft are not to succumb to despair, of course they should go to Northern College—if it survives the cuts. They could even retire to a Buddhist monastery. In the meantime, Murdoch can get on with buying up the airwaves, while C4 must justify its schedules by competing for advertising space. Which of these positions will ensure the continuance of *Critical Eye*?

Jaci Stephen is on holiday

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Solomon or dinosaur?

LORD DENNING: A LIFE
Iris Freeman
Hutchinson, £25

Conor Gearty

What are judges for? In the old days of socialist certainty, the answer was clear: the courts were the enemy of the people, the front-line from which, camouflaged in the spurious neutrality of the rule of law, the judges did the work of the ruling classes. They had tried to throttle the trade unions at birth, had spontaneously criminalised many forms of efficient picketing and were enthusiastic advocates both of public order and private property. The socialist-in-power suffered these enemy judges to continue, but only on condition that Parliament could undo their malevolence and that they kept to a strict vow of political silence inside and outside the courtroom. Their final eradication would have to wait until the revolution.

Today, the judges are the heroes of the left. Lord Woolf excoriates the Home Secretary and draws support from seven of his colleagues. The Lord Chief Justice appears on the radio and slams this or that proposal on criminal justice. The Master of the Rolls calls for the European Convention on Human Rights to become part of UK law so as to prevent the abuse of governmental power. Labour applauds all of this, barely aware that some day the judicial kick may be aimed at a different political groin. But perhaps Labour have no policies left that could offend Her Majesty's judges? Nowhere is the foresaking of socialism more obvious than in the party's new enthusiasm for the courts.

But if politics is to be composed entirely of variations on a liberal capitalist theme, then perhaps it is just as well to have the governing élites fighting among themselves? At a time when Westminster is concerned exclusively with the victims of crime, it is surely valuable to have the odd Woolf standing up for the victims of our non-society. It could be argued that justice and equality in retreat cannot afford to be choosy about allies.

Lord Denning, astonishingly still alive and lurking in Hampshire like a vast legal dinosaur, would understand the current debate well. As a serving judge from 1944 until his retirement in 1982, Denning was a pioneer of political activism on the Bench. Proud of never having been a member of a political party nor even having voted in a parliamentary election, Denning nevertheless devoted his career to transparently political causes. His version of justice led him radically to transform aspects of the law of contract and tort so as to make both areas of law more accessible. He was famously ahead of his time in protecting deserted wives and in exposing the executive to judicial control.

John Profumo, subject of Tom Denning's first bestseller, with his family in pre-scandal days: from the new paperback edition of Ben Pimlott's great biography of "Harold Wilson" (HarperCollins, £9.99)

But to get his sympathy, you had first to appeal to his prejudice. Little of Denning's magical solicitude for the underdog was extended to members of trade unions or to left-wing thinkers or (infamously) to wrongfully convicted Irish "terrorists". Iris Freeman, a generally sympathetic but not eulogistic biographer, feels the need to declare that when "it came to meeting people, [Denning] was not anti-black, anti-Irish, anti-Catholic, or anti-Jew". But judges are not required to meet litigants before they rule against their stereotype. Denning's fall came when allegedly racist remarks he made in a book about a riot trial in Bristol were shown to be based on a number of factual inaccuracies; it was as though the real man had finally wriggled free from the discipline of law.

Freeman deals fairly with this episode and with the many other embarrassments that have accompanied the old man's rather sad decline. But she is determined to put the last years in the context of a long and largely productive career and, in this she largely succeeds. The Denning of the first 65 years of this century was a remarkable creature: the draper's son from a small Hampshire village who made it via a treble first in law and mathematics at Oxford to the highest court in the land, the House of Lords, and then to the headship (as Master of the Rolls) of the civil division of the court of appeal; the radical judge of the 1940s and 1950s whose genius for the common law was matched by an unrivalled elegance of legal prose: the country lad whose accent and schooling set him apart from his grander judicial brethren.

Freeman is very good on the details and writes well, but she is not concerned to place Denning in any political or historical context. Without any very strong analytical dimension, the book sometimes drifts off into a diary of greatest judicial hits and enjoyable foreign visits. Perhaps this is unavoidable: judges, even great ones, do not fill their lives with prurient litter. One longs for at least an occasional indiscretion, but the tone of moral probity is unrelenting. Denning appears to have had little hinterland outside the law and to have developed very little intellectually during his long life.

It is clear that Denning's social background made him more rather than less deferential to the state on matters of security and civil liberties, thereby confirming the obvious fact that a more broadly based judiciary does not necessarily mean a more enlightened Bench. It was no accident that Macmillan turned to Denning when he needed a judge to absolve him from any culpable involvement in the Profumo scandal, and he wrote to him on his retirement nearly 20 years later expressing his "gratitude for the kindness" extended to him "at a very difficult and delicate time."

The length of Denning's tenure in office clearly affected his judgment, as did his freedom from any accountability for his actions. A type of populist megalomania appears to have infected his final years, but it was only when this became manifest in an extra-judicial publication that it became an occupational liability; such ramblings on the Bench were protected by their mystical status as law.

Today's judges may be sound on prison reform, but the lesson of Lord Denning is that you cannot pick and choose a judge's prejudices. They come fully formed and unpredictable. Judges are dangerous icons, even for a society desperate for saviours to rescue it from its own government.

Conor Gearty is reader in law at King's College, London

Side orders

THE RED QUEEN: SEX AND THE EVOLUTION OF HUMAN NATURE
Matt Ridley
Viking, £17.99

Marek Kohn

Among all the just-so stories dreamed up in pursuit of the biological bedrock of human nature, perhaps the most endearing was the observation that male students carried their books around campus with their arms hanging straight down, whereas female students preferred to clasp their burdens to their bosoms. The inference was that undergrad-

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uates divided the same way as their forebears on the African savannah: males toting spears, and females carrying babies.

The *Journal of Irreproducible Results* satirised this insight in a spoof research report from a kibbutz, with a faked photograph showing the triumph of the genes: a man defying his unnatural liberal socialisation by dangling a baby from his arm like a briefcase.

Undeterred, excursions into sociobiology invariably include a stop at a kibbutz, whose return to the conventional gender roles and the marketplace is adduced to show the folly of going against nature. It's hard to believe that even the pointiest-headed of sociobiologists really imagine that a kibbutz exists in total cultural isolation from the rest of the world, so why do they all, Matt Ridley included, descend to this dinner-party level of logic? The answer, I think, is that they can get away with it.

The tide is theirs: after the end of the cold war, after the New Right, all social and economic phenomena appear naturally ordained. That's the sense in which the phrase "new world order" retains its significance.

Sociobiology today, therefore, is the easy option. You can obscure the gaps between levels of explanation with a wave of the hands and an appeal to common sense; you can charm your less critical readers with the language of evolutionary "design", as long as you include a token disclaimer rejecting teleology. And you can pose as oppressed with the inevitable denunciations of (the moratorium starts here) you-know-whatness.

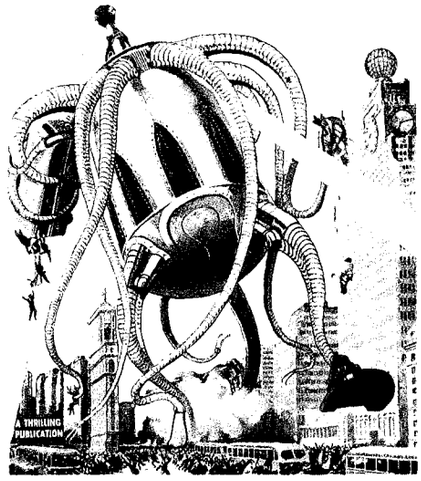
Matt Ridley allows himself such indulgences. But *The Red Queen*'s flaws are all generic; its strengths are individual and considerable. It begins with a review of one of evolution's basic conundrums: why does sex exist? If evolutionary success is measured in terms of the transmission of genes, those transmitted by virgins that can give birth have a big advantage over those which depend upon sexual reproduction.

The only explanation which seems to add up is that the shuffling of genes through sex may help organisms out-compete parasites. Life's competition never stops; like the Red Queen, organisms have to keep running to stay in the same place.

Once a species has divided into sexes, their genetic interests diverge, to the cost of the male praying mantis in particular. In humans, the genetic logic would appear to indicate that males should spread their seed as widely as possible. No surprises here, but the optimal female strategy is not, as widely assumed, the exact opposite. Rather, a woman's best bet would seem to be a monogamous bond with a man to help rear the offspring, combined with opportunistic adultery in order to take on genes from superior studs.

Most of us, I suspect, are now ready to accept that there may be a kernel of truth in these ideas, just as most of us seem to accept that girl and boy babies are inherently different in their behaviour. The question is how far you take your speculations. Ridley kicks off with all the vigorous certainty that one would expect from a former science correspondent of the *Economist*, whose motto is "simplify, then exaggerate". It makes for a gripping account.

By the end, to his credit, he has become more circumspect, perhaps realising that he has gone too far in his musings on the function of beauty. These will doubtless afford light relief to future historians of science. For now, *The Red Queen* is a terrific book to have a damn good argument with.



A spot of bother with the extraterrestrials: "The History of the Future" by Christophe Canto and Odile Faliu (translated by Francis Cowper; Flammarion, £30) is a thorough and often hilarious record of artists' and writers' efforts to imagine the 21st century

Read planet

GREEN MARS
Kim Stanley Robinson
HarperCollins, £14.99

David V Barrett

Before the dawn of the Space Age, amateur astronomer and SF writer Patrick Moore was pleading for more (and more accurate) science in science fiction. At a 1955 UN conference, he even suggested that science-based SF novels should be approved by a selection board appointed by each nation's science writers' association. He saw SF as "a means of propogating sound and rational ideas among those who seldom or never read a factual work."

This somewhat paternalistic view is still propounded by veteran SF editor George Hay, founder of the Science Fiction Foundation, now based at Liverpool University. "I am concerned that people should remember that 'science fiction' does include the word 'science'", he told the *Independent* earlier this month.

In a recent article in the *TLS*, the critic John Clute argued that Sputnik sounded the death-knell for the "dream of progress" in science fiction. His argument was very selective; but he was basically saying that the reality of the Space Age has forced a growing-up from the naive utopian optimism of some golden-age SF. Good space-based SF must now be aware of the intrusions of politics, economics and the whole lumber-room of socio-historical background; rose-tinted spectacles must give way to the awkward complications of reality.

Red Mars, the first book in Kim Stanley Robinson's mammoth trilogy, was largely about the politics of terraforming Mars: not just how it should best be done (science and technology), but whether it should be done at all (morality and politics).

Some of the settlers believed that it was wrong to try to turn Mars into Earth No 2; others wanted a breathable atmosphere, plants, animals and an end to face-masks. In 2061 there was a major revolt; the UN Transitional Authority clamped down and the rebels went underground.

By the time of *Green Mars*, a few decades later, the greening of the planet is well under way. Lichens, sturdy alpine flowers, even some fir trees are beginning to grow. The atmosphere is thickening, and mirrors above the planet to magnify the sun's rays slowly but surely warm up the surface.

The rebels are divided over terraforming the planet; some are still completely against it; others argue for a thin layer of breathable atmosphere so that people can live in the hollows while the physical high ground can still be essentially Martian. The moral high ground has become less clear-cut. But if Mars is to gain independence from Earth, the rebels must work together: they must accept equality without conformity.

This is all good stuff; sound, solid, science-based SF. Patrick Moore and George Hay should be delighted. There are pages of painstakingly researched detail on botany, biochemistry, meteorology, geology, astrophysics.

John Major and John Patten, desperate to get more teenagers to opt for science, should make this compulsory reading for every 13-year-old. Capture 'em with fiction; indoctrinate 'em young. The diversity of political morality is excellent, the planetary setting utterly credible and the science impeccable. So why is this 571-page novel such heavy going?

Robinson has laboured so hard to make it real that he's forgotten that a novel—even a science-based SF novel—should entertain as well as educate. *Red Mars* had the excitement of introduction; the third book, *Blue Mars*, which will bring oceans to the former red planet, should have the satisfaction of conclusion. *Green Mars* suffers from the traditional problems of the middle volume of a trilogy: very little happens, but it all has to be debated endlessly.

Of the sudden rash of Mars-based SF novels in the past two years, *Green Mars* (with *Red Mars*) is certainly the most realistic, but it may well be the dullest. Maybe there's a case for bringing back John Clute's naive dream of progress.

David V Barrett is the editor of "Digital Dreams"

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Gas guzzler

THIS OTHER EDEN
Ben Elton
Simon & Schuster, £5.99

Vicky Hutchings

Ben Elton is a tedious book, and I shall persist in so referring to it in protest at the size and position of the author's name on the cover (at least three times as big as the title, which is buried at the bottom). But if you like Ben Elton's brand of comedy, then this is the book you will like. Fans will enjoy the stretching of Elton's literary talent as he manages to bring penises into the action as often as he does without undue repetition. Although I toyed with the epithet "proud upstander" for a while, my favourites are "miracle of natural engineering" and "wedding tackle".

The time is the third millennium, in a cyberpunkish world of virtual-reality machines, plastic surgery and private police forces for the rich, and skin cancer, lung disease, poverty and crime for the poor. The "most recent" Five Mile Island meltdown has just happened, two-fifths of Russia is rumoured to be no longer habitable, the ozone layer is gone. Those impoverished cities not able to afford an orbital BioShield or BioTubes over their pavements, in order to keep the inhabitants safe from the sun's deadly ultraviolet rays, have changed over to night-time working.

More and more people are deciding to buy a Claustrosphere, a sort of Center Park-cum-greenhouse, so they will have somewhere to hide when the world is so polluted that it becomes uninhabitable. Those who have them live in fear of those who don't, and who might try to get in for free.

A great deal of the drama is set in Los Angeles: "Every time the city was rebuilt, the disaffected have-nots would come up from the badlands to loot it and burn it down again." With what result? "This, obviously, was a source of considerable irritation to the civic authorities." Not cyberpunk, but cybernerd: you don't find bathos in a William Gibson novel.

There is only one actual nerd in the book, but a great deal is made of his intelligence. He is a short, unprepossessing man with a startling physical resemblance to Ben Elton. (He also answers to a woman's name.) "His glasses were thick, and his hair always greasy. He was what Americans call a nerd, and since Judy was an American, nerd became his middle name. He was a textbook nerd." Do we have the picture yet? "In terms of appearance there was quite literally nothing about him that was not nerdy."

Judy is the man who, on page 445, finally realises what has been staring everyone in the face since we were back in (let's be charitable) double figures. Jurgen Thor ("His party trick was to crack walnuts with his foreskin"), the leader of Natura, the World Environmental Party, is in partnership with Plastic Tolstoy ("If power is the ultimate aphrodisiac, Plastic Tolstoy could have teased an erection out of a concrete monk"), the super product-placeman who markets Claustrospheres.

Every time there is a tanker disaster, say, or a nuclear explosion, a few more Claustrospheres get sold. So Tolstoy makes sure he knows when and where the "accidents" are going to take place so the advertisements can be pre-booked to appear on TV at the same time. The upside for Natura is that they are also in on the secret, and can get maximum political value out of the event by being there when it happens, cameras and spokespeople at the ready. A few real accidents continue, irritatingly, to happen outside their control. But as far as they are able, Thor and Tolstoy are taking no chances with fate. The world, as a consequence, gets dirtier and deadlier.

There were two surprises in *Ben Elton*. The first was a rant against the length of time it takes to get a pint of Guinness in Dublin, which was actually rather amusing. The other is the happy ending, so I won't spoil your fun by telling you what happens.

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Late news

MARTYRS' DAY: CHRONICLE OF A SMALL WAR
Michael Kelly
Macmillan, £16.99

Simon Louvish

Once upon a time there was a far-off country about which we knew little, but to whose leaders our leaders were happy to sell huge quantities of arms. As late as 1986, the only book you could find in print in Britain that chronicled the evils of Saddam Hussein's Iraq was a human rights report from Zed Books and the Committee against Repression and for Democratic Rights in Iraq. It was a horrific catalogue for the few who paid attention.

Now there are floods of publications, thunderous denunciations, Desert Storm pop-up books. We can read the Slugletts' rigorous *Iraq since 1958* or shiver to Samir al-Khalil's *Republic of Fear*: the only book by an Iraqi on the subject that anyone will read. But al-Khalil (real name Kenan Makiya) has obtained his popularity at a price: that of telling the west what it wants to hear.

I am one of those freaks who would rather argue with the horse's mouth than pick my way through vicarious anger, however well-meaning or well written. Michael Kelly's late arrival on the Saddam trail qualifies on both those counts. As a correspondent for the *New Republic*, the *Boston Globe* and *Gentleman's Quarterly*, he travelled in all the countries affected by the Gulf war of 1991. He has put together some chilling descriptions of the war's surreal anarchy, in which western hi-tech met eastern rhetoric and won.

His account of the carnage along the "road of death" from Kuwait in the last days of the war is graphic and effective. He has a good eye and ear for the sights and sounds of the region, and a good bullshit detector that breaks down—as it often does with US reporters—in Israel, of which he knows little.

In its observations of the run-up, the assault and the aftermath, this is good journalism. But is that enough? True, for the US media such a thing is miraculous. But on this side of the pond, we were able to read Robert Fisk, Richard Dowden, Julie Flint, and the heroic efforts of Spain's Alfonso Rojo to report from Baghdad. Despite the BBC-ITN-CNN blitz, we did get a whiff of the reality.

Even counting the best of them, journalism is not everything. There remain the largely untold tales of invisible, anonymous protagonists. At one point, in Kurdistan, Kelly tells of a young Kurd who has written an unpublished novel, a subversive history of Iraq in the past 20 years "in the style of magic realism". I want to read that book so bad I can taste it, but the odds are I never will. Nor will anyone, in any language.

We live in a world of thousands of unheard narratives, of so many sights occurring away from the TV lenses that have therefore never happened. To give Kelly his due, he is aware of this, like any good journalist. He does what he can to tell the story second-hand. But it is second-hand, and the absurd puffs on the cover (Robert Hughes calls it "the best piece of war writing in a generation") contribute to the warping of our expectations.

Hughes, who excavated Australia's history so well, should know better. Go back to Kurdistan, Kelly, and bring out that young writer's manuscript. On second thoughts: knowing the heap of original work on slush piles and the hill of bankable inferior narratives on bookshop shelves, perhaps one should not raise any more false hopes.

"Ruined: 1869 panic": An engraving from "The Gilded Age: the super-rich of the Edwardian era" (Cassell, £25), Alexis Gregory's suitably grand and ornate history of the hard-faced plutocracy of a century ago

Fog-bound steampunk

THE LIST OF SEVEN
Mark Frost
Hutchinson, £9.99

Kim Newman

In 1884, Arthur Conan Doyle, a struggling doctor venturing tentatively on a literary career, has just suffered a humiliating round of rejection after writing *The Dark Brotherhood*: a theosophically inspired novel about a conspiracy of high-placed diabolists who intend to take over the country, and probably the world. Conan Doyle attends a seance and witnesses outrageously faked manifestations before being battered somewhat senseless by a parade of genuine phenomena.

He is caught up in the wake of dashing Jack Sparks, who claims to be a secret agent of the crown. Sparks explains that *The Dark Brotherhood* has struck home with the seven directors of a publishing house who happen to be a *genuine* conspiracy of high-placed diabolists intending to take over the country, and probably the world.

Sparks demonstrates many familiar attributes (mastery of disguise, addiction to cocaine, association with a giant hound) while Conan Doyle himself does deductive tricks. The pell-mell plot of this first novel finds room for cameos of worthies such as Madame Blavatsky and Bram Stoker, a procession of reanimated mummies, zombified ex-convicts, giant leeches, lawks-a-mighty Cockneys and fabulous stolen Egyptian artefacts. Sparks recounts his lifelong struggle with his Moriartyish evil older brother, but Conan Doyle has doubts about the sanity of his companion and begins to suspect that he too may be involved in the vast conspiracy against the crown he claims to serve.

Frost is best known as the co-creator (with David Lynch) of *Twin Peaks*, which blended bizarre occultism with small-town murder mystery. He has also tangled with diabolic conspiracies in his script for John Schlesinger's *The Believers*, not to mention voodoo curses and decadent aristocrats in the rather less well-known direct-to-video horror, *Scared Stiff*. Like Nicholas Meyer (whose forthcoming follow-up to *The Seven Per-Cent Solution* pits Sherlock Holmes against the Phantom of the Opera), Frost has a powerful attraction to the fogbound conventions of Victorian and Edwardian mystery, where rationalism often blends with the mysticism of secret societies and ancient curses.

To his eternal credit, Conan Doyle, a sincere and devout believer in spiritualism, never presented Sherlock Holmes with a mystery without a rational explanation. He shaped his character's world to suit the detective's logical approach. Frost, who seems unwilling to discern much difference between Conan Doyle's vision and Stoker's, abandons such niceties and lays on the wonders pretty thick. Trying for that *Twin Peaks* see-saw between strange humour and seriously twisted horrors, he throws in—as did the series—some cosmic evils derived from H P Lovecraft.

In a recent essay on the widely accepted belief that Stoker's fictional Count Dracula was intended to represent the historical Vlad the Impaler, Anthony Ambrogio noted "how often movies about famous writers insist on showing that the incidents and people in their lives were direct models for the plots and characters in their novels".

In *The List of Seven*, Frost's Stoker witnesses incidents (coffins conveyed ashore at Whitby during a storm) and meets characters (a garrulous old salt) we "recognise" as originals for incidents and characters in *Dracula*. The book climaxes with Conan Doyle compelled to give credit to his friend Sparks, who can never receive official approval, by representing his achievements through the character of Sherlock Holmes.

It's an amusing game, but it does a disservice to those to whom Frost would like to pay

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homage. In the shadow of outstanding novels such as Tim Powers' *The Anubis Gates*, this brand of revisited Victoriana (sometimes called "steampunk") is thriving. And *The List of Seven* does stage some its melodramatic flourishes with relish.

However, there's a sloppiness that washes around the edges of the book. It suggests that Frost is so used, as a screenwriter, to being rewritten that he neglects to polish his final draft. The plot never comes up with an explanation for the parallels between Conan Doyle's novel and a real conspiracy. Most unforgivably, the fictional character of Sir Nigel Gull, one of the villains, metamorphoses into the historical Sir William Gull—often unfairly linked to the Jack the Ripper murders—which raises all manner of confusions. It is impossible, indeed not quite desirable, to revive intact the modes and moods of century-old fiction. But an illusion must be created, and slips like this do a lot to expose the works behind the curtain.

Kim Newman's "Anno Dracula" is out in paperback from Pocket Books

Poetic licence

SO IDLE A ROGUE: THE LIFE AND DEATH OF LORD ROCHESTER
Jeremy Lamb
Allison & Busby, £14.99

Loraine Fletcher

The life of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, raises a lot of problems about what shits poets often are, how they get away with it, and whether poetry reads differently once you know it was written by a privileged bully. Rochester has always got away with it. His father helped Charles II escape to France when Cromwell defeated the Royalists at Worcester. After the Restoration, Charles extended his gratitude and indulgence to the son, feelings a popular biographer may well share.

Alcoholism solves most problems in *So Idle a Rogue*: Rochester was genetically predisposed to it, and so mentally and physically ill. He behaved heroically at 17 in two fierce naval battles against the Dutch, but was corrupted by bad examples at court. He always had an essentially religious mind and "his base desires caused him much self-loathing, by ravishing, among other girls, one Nell Browne". So that's OK. He did the right thing in the end, we're assured, renounced atheism and died a Christian, though most of the evidence suggests his conversion was stage-managed by his mother and Gilbert Burnet, an Episcopalian cleric on the make.

In the agreeable Restoration world of Jeremy Lamb, wenches are always ravished, rakes are infamous and outrageous, wives are beautiful and long-suffering. Lamb's handling of two merry contemporary anecdotes will illustrate his method. Rochester and his friends promised on their honour to jump into the Thames in turn for a bet. He changed his mind at the last minute and threw a hunchbacked musician they called "your Honour" in instead, with an obvious joke. Lamb omits the musician's hunched back.

On a country road they met a farm girl going to market, bought butter from her and left it on a tree trunk. Not liking waste, she "sneaked back" and retrieved it. So they rode her down, stood her on her head and spread it onto her genitals ("clapped the butter upon her breech": Lamb, quoting the original source without comment). This he calls "some silliness outside Woodstock".

The victims' humiliation goes unremarked, while a modified Rochester lives on as one of the naughty bits for English literature and the heritage industry. Even Paddy Lyons' good introduction to the Everyman Paperback edition of the poetry (Dent, £5.99) trendily praises his democratic leanings. I doubt if the villagers around Woodstock noticed them.

With all that, he was very funny, extempore and on paper. To a dog that bit him in the Strand he said, "I wish you were married, and living in the country". Friends kept him drunk, and Etherege gave a romanticised version of him as Dorimant in *The Man of Mode*. His love lyrics are insolently graceful, though some long passages of satire never rise about the petty malice of their occasion.

He's a poet of brilliant climactic couplets. In his verse-play, *Sodom*, among all the fucking and frigging, Princess Swivia points to her vagina saying: "This is the workhouse of the world's chief trade/On this soft anvil all mankind was made", and the usual contempt for ridiculous flesh turns for a moment to wonder. In *A Satire Against Mankind*, his vision of brain and body after death—"Huddled in dirt the reasoning engine lies/Who was so proud, so witty and so wise"—registers the gravity of his atheism.

Lamb quotes long extracts from the poetry but has nothing of interest to say about it. He merely endorses the old legends, playing down the homosexuality and playing up the drink. After his teens, Rochester attacked only the helpless, so a misogynist and elitist literary culture has mythologised him since. One could argue for schizophrenia as plausibly as for alcoholism; his love of disguises might suggest this. Not that any label explains why "Great wits are sure to madness near allied", as Dryden noted at the time.

England's social landscape remains much the same in this dense book. There's a pretty deference to our betters in the acknowledgments to the Duke of Marlborough. Lamb's sexism is so massive as to obscure even Rochester's. But the Burnet school of eleventh-hour religious conversion flourishes best, it seems, in US branches of AA. Graham Greene's *Lord Rochester's Monkey* (1974) has most of the same extracts from the same sources, better illustration and an intelligent narrative.

Loraine Fletcher teaches English at Reading University

PRINTOUT

Prize fight

Boyd Tonkin

The high drama at this week's Booker Prize ceremony happened outside, not inside, the Guildhall. Roddy Doyle duly pocketed his well-merited but hardly unexpected cheque for "Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha". Meanwhile, 50 sacked workers from Middlebrook Mushrooms in Yorkshire—a Booker subsidiary—lobbied the dinner-jacketed scabs with a fervour seldom seen in these apathetic days. Cue for facile contrast between the pampered literati and agribusiness helots who must fight to defend a wage of £100 per week. Fair enough: but remember that Doyle is almost the only Booker contender for a decade whom one would trust to write a convincing novel about low-paid mushroom packers.

Still, the picket and publicity clearly rattled the sponsors. The chairman recalled that, 20 years ago, John Berger gave half his prize money for "G." to the Black Panthers, in protest against Booker's West Indian connections. Now, he announced, the Guyanese government had invited the firm back to manage the country's sugar estates: "We do not oppress people". At least the protest forced some sort of response.

Lord Gowrie, the chairman of the judges (who famously couldn't survive on a £33,000 salary when a junior minister), regretted that this year's submission "was a bit short on the Balzacian business of earning a living". So what's new? Again, Doyle is the one candidate who can't be faulted on his grasp of the realities of employment—and unemployment. He taught English for 14 years on the north Dublin estates, within a community that offered him what he calls "a huge, deep pool of inspiration. I dived in and was happily drowned."

On this side of the Irish Sea, it's hard to locate a single major author who would treat a featureless postwar suburb as anything more than fodder for doom and gloom about family breakdown and teenage lawlessness. The Prime Minister and the entire smug Establishment pretend to revere Anthony Trollope, the chronicler of Barsetshire. But where are our chroniclers of Stevenage, of Skelmersdale, of Basildon?

If they do exist, publishers don't encourage them. Roddy Doyle points out how absurd it is to label him a "populist": "The Commitments" was originally self-published because no one else wanted it. I suspect that British publishers have overlooked work of the same calibre because it failed to fit the narrow norms of "literary fiction". Doyle's victory on the critical and commercial fronts should change that. Who knows: we might even get a novel about militant mushroom-packers. Zola went down the pits to gather material for his epic of class conflict, "Germinal". Now someone should go up to Yorkshire and start researching "Fungal".

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CHILD POVERTY ACTION GROUP

A conference to set a social and economic agenda to challenge the injustice of poverty.

SATURDAY 6 NOVEMBER 1993, 10am–4.30pm
London Voluntary Sector RESOURCE CENTRE,
356 Holloway Road, London N7 6PA

The government is currently reviewing its public spending budget with social security firmly on the agenda. The Commission on Social Justice is reviewing the tax and benefits systems as part of its wider agenda of meeting the principles of social justice. At this year's annual conference CPAG takes up the challenge to ensure poverty is at the top of all agendas.

Speakers confirmed so far:
GORDON BORRIE, Chair of the Commission on Social Justice
EITHNE MCLAUGHLIN, Lecturer in Social Policy, Queen's University of Belfast
PAUL JOHNSON, Economist, Institute for Fiscal Studies
SUE SLIPMAN, Director, National Council for One Parent Families
FRAN BENNETT, Freelancer (former CPAG Director)
GERISON LANSDOWNE, Director, Children's Rights Development Unit
RICHARD CLEMENTS, Director, Basic Income Group

The CHILD POVERTY ACTION GROUP is a national charity which aims to ensure that families on low incomes get the most out of their rights to existing welfare benefits – and that, in the longer term, changes are made to bring about a society free from poverty for all families.

If you wish to support CPAG or get involved in its campaigning activities, please write for further information to:

CHILD POVERTY ACTION GROUP, 1-5 BATH STREET, LONDON EC1V 9PY. Tel: 071-253 3406.

Charity No. 29484

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ENDGAMES: Weekend Competition

GRYPH'S QUIZ

The answers all have something in common

1. Submit
2. Order
3. Arrest
4. Fish
5. Amphibian
6. Insect
7. Thin stratum
8. Pantomime character
9. Detective (Sergeant)
10. Whack

Answers below

No 3300 Set by Tim Hopkins

We asked for a stately sonnet that was entirely devoid of meaning.

Report by Ms de Meaner

I give you the covering note sent in by one of the winners, Peter Marks: "*Devoid* needs no qualification, so I have taken it that *entirely* means *in its entirety*. Besides, resounding nonsense alone can become boring, and occasional oblique suggestions of meaning, provided they are negated or confused elsewhere, seem necessary for the conflict and development to sustain 14 lines." Just so.

So out went the nonsense verse, out went John Marriott's list—*Brazil, Colombia, Paraguay, Peru,/The pediment, the column, architrave,/King's Cross, St Pancras, Euston, Waterloo,/The mausoleum, sepulchre or grave . . .*—out went George Rees' one-for-one substitutions—*And then I heard the sweetest sight I've felt/And drank an odourless rock cake I'd smelt . . . But soon a noisy calm began to blow/As thousands came to see the foot I'd dealt/That tasted to the ear so rough and svelte . . .* And last, out went those that made perfect sense after all, just as Watson Weeks predicted. £15 prizes.

No 3303 Set by Margaret Rogers

Can we have excerpts from an episode of *Challenge Anneka*, in which she attempts to rebuild the shambles that is the Tory party. 250 words in by 11 November.

Quiz answers

All are costume details: 1) Bow; 2) Garter; 3) Collar; 4) Ruff; 5) Buttons; 6) Fly; 7) Seam; 8) Frog; 9) Cuff; 10) Belt. Note: 9) The Moonstone

O death is there an opulence within
That fulgent flame which dispossesses thee,
As consummation multiplies the sea
Except the nation obfuscates the sin,
And those who orbit our portentious din,
Where repetitious loads sanction the free,
Let reverential sections revoke me
When kindred partings neutralise the skin.

Now certain plaudits lubricate their wiles,
Augur silences that overstate the act,
When mordant sutures linger under smiles,
Flagrant flourishes better grow with tact
From spartan roots which ululate on tiles,
While from slow birth we spurn a profane fact.

R J Pickles

When gravid galleons beshrew their dream,
Like corpses in a charnel's oozy horn,
And solitary crowds outweigh the corn
Whose mortal resolution doth beseem
The mild Antipodean monotreme,
One silent calls, whose viewless glance forlorn
Strikes visceral, as angels yet unborn
Throng to the oaken blades of Gobi's stream.

Raise, then, the foaming goblet! Fly our path!
With amber grapes and melons sad, inveigh
From brazen voice the unkissed Polak's wrath;
Boulter the carmine chessmen on the way.
If this be war's propitious aftermath,
Pour forth in haste the inviolable day.

Cornelius Doyle

Whenever arcs of thunder raise the wake,
Or plunder the apartments of the dark,
Then every Danish duck will have its drake,
And marvel at the Spartans who embark;
For few there be, when carrots are dependent
Upon a dream of arrogance by day,
Who will not think an alibi resplendent
Which takes the age of innocence away.

Sleep smoothly; breathe; the artifice of pother
Belongs to songbirds when they are obscene,
And canisters contain the seeds of glee.
Why trump a cheese? Hyenas never bother
To waste their tears upon a ruptured spleen,
While figs, although expensive, are not free.

Will Bellenger

Gaudy with blood-red emblems of that dawn,
The sapient lambs of hell, aglow from the womb,
Muster and congregate upon the lawn
Of darkness. Their flocculent squadrons loom.

Blue as cumulus clouds in a milk-white sky,
The goats of heaven preen each prickly horn
And, scorning succubi and incubi,
Await apotheosis at midnight's morn.

The palette sombres, pulchritude now fades
And tones ferment. Posterity's paradigm?
Honour's etiolated cavalcades,
Jaundiced with umbrage, stain the files of time.

Hope's oracle is yet a tremulous boy.
Where are tomorrow's molten snows of joy?

Peter Marks

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CHESS

Mastering the Spanish, with the read and play method, by Daniel King and Pietro Ponzetto (B T Batsford, 245 pp, £14.99), has just been published.

Batsford's "Mastering the . . ." series has received acclaim with, for example, Jon Speelman describing it as "an excellent way to learn an opening". This is the first volume in the series with which I have become acquainted, although Ponzetto has co-authored, with International Master Robert Bellin, *Mastering the King's Indian Defence* and *Mastering the Modern Benoni and the Benko Gambit.*

The blurb summarises the format. "*Mastering the Openings* is a radically different series of openings books. Each opening is explained in terms of its essential strategic plans and typical pawn structures, so that you gain a genuine understanding of the positions that arise from an opening. Never again will you be stuck for a good move, because you will know exactly what plan to follow and what tactical ideas to use."

A bit over the top, perhaps, but the gist is clear. We are taken through a list of chapters that outline The Spanish (or The Ruy Lopez for traditionalists) in terms of the various central pawn formations that may occur. The Blocked Centre, The Exchange Centre, The Mobile, The Open, and so on, are all considered. The final chapter is on The Bird Centre, ie that which arises after 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 Nd4 4.Nxd4 exd4. I have always had a liking for this antique system, although I have never yet got around to playing it. The principal illustrative game that the authors have chosen here is Kamsky v Ivanchuk, Tilburg 1990.

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 Nd4 4.Nxd4 exd4 5.0-0 . . . I once played 5.f4 against Tal in a blitz game, but nobody else ever has. **5. . . Bc5 6.d3 c6 7.Ba4 7. . . Ne7 8.f4** . . . Kamsky gets round to it a little later on. The major diversion is the plan with 8.Qh5 d5 9.Nd2 0-0 10.Nf3 a5 11.c3 dxc3 12.bxc3 f6 13.Rel Bd6 with equal prospects. **8 . . . f5**. A thematic counterthrust but here mistimed because White is able to keep the Black king in the centre. 8 . . .d5 was correct. **9.Bb3! d5 10.exd5 Nxd5 11.Rel+ Kf8 12.Qh5 g6 13.Qh6+ Kg8 14.Nd2** . . . Clearly Black is very far from getting it together here. **14. . . Bf8 15.Qh3 Bg7 16.Nf3 h6 17.Ne5 Qf6 18.Bxd5+!** A simple transformation of advantage. Both d pawns, particularly d4, are chronically weak. **18 . . . cxd5 19.b3 Kh7 20.Bb2 Qb6 21.Qf3 Re8 22.Qf2!** . . . Good enough, but there was nothing wrong with taking the d5 pawn since after 22. . . Rd8 Black is very tied up. **22. . . Bxe5 23.Rxe5 Rxe5 24.Bxd4 Re2 25.Bxb6 Rxf2 26.Bxf2 Kg7.** With rooks on the board the technical realisation of White's advantage, notwithstanding the presence of bishops of opposite colours, is not so difficult. **27.a4 Be6 28.a5 a6 29.Bd4+ Kf7 30.Kf2 Rc8 31.Ra2 g5 32.Be5 Kg6 33.Ke3 Kh5 34.Kd2** . . . unnecessary. He should have gone straight into d4 **34. . . Rg8 35.g3 Kg4 36.Ke3 Kh3 37.c3 d4+** Cracking. 37. . . Rc8 would have held a fort a little longer. **38.Kxd4 Rd8+ 39.Ke3 Bxb3 40.Rb2 Bd5 41.c4 Bg2 42.Rb6 Bf1 43.Rxh6+ Kg2 44.d4 g4 45.c5 Bc4 46.Rf6** Black resigned.

It's a nice book, so I hope Daniel gets sackfuls of royalties to accompany the quantities of fanmail I hear he has been receiving following his Channel 4 appearances.

As regards the World Championships, if that's what it was, I was deeply impressed by some of the general comments Kasparov produced at many of the post-game press conferences. In game 10, he remarked that: "After White plays fxe6 in the Sicilian Defence, then Black should simply be better, unless there is something immediate." Most cogent were his criticisms of Short's play in game 15 where he pinpointed Black's recapture on e7 with the rook rather than with the queen, as constituting an almost decisive error, since the plan of fianchettoing his queen's bishop was wholly inappropriate with the a pawn moved to a6. This sort of depth of strategic thinking was way over almost everybody else's head.

James Plaskett

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BACKCHAT

Mat Coward on telepathy's role in getting more women into the shadow cabinet

They just won't take a hint, these Labour members of parliament. They're told to elect more women to the shadow cabinet, and what do they do? They elect fewer. This can't be allowed to go on; secret ballots aren't the way of the future, but merely an infantile distraction.

One comrade, one vote is the dinosaur cry of the dodo left, those stubborn asses with their heads in the sand. What the modern, post-democratic Labour Party needs is telepathic centralism, the truly modern way of conducting elections.

In the old days, when everything was bad, an election was nothing more scientific than a bunch of candidates asking everyone to vote for them, and then everyone else deciding who they'd like to vote for. The votes were counted up, and the ones who'd got the most, got in.

While this was fine for primitive cultures, like the stone age, the iron age, and the suffragists, it could hardly be described as modern, or efficient. Under the secret ballot system, any fool could be elected, if he was popular enough with his peers. Sometimes, this resulted in people being elected who didn't agree with the people who'd been elected previously. Or, even sillier, several people with differing views being elected simultaneously.

This led to all manner of problems—meritocracy, debate, discussion; honestly, stuff so unmodern it makes your flesh creep—but the biggest problem of all was of a genderological nature.

Some time previously, using all the most up-to-the-minute tools of their intensely technological trade, modern statisticians had determined that Labour would not be trusted to form a government until its outer skin became visibly female.

The reasoning went like this. Women are very thick. All they know is babies. Show them a cure for poverty and they will yawn. Show them a red rosette on a C&A blouse, on the other hand, and they will immediately say, "That politician's got breasts! I think I'd better vote for it!" (This theory is called feminism, by the way.)

Obviously, women being what women are, you couldn't rely on any of them to get elected under their own steam; and that was what prompted the creation of the harmen. These were feminine-style androids, programmed to say nothing ever except "I do so agree, Leader", which everyone would be required to vote for on the understanding that they wouldn't be allowed to do any harm. They had special seats installed for them in the shadow cabinet room, with signs saying "Please give up this seat if you see someone who is weedier or feebler or more pathetic than you are standing."

Naturally, cynics sneered "It'll never work", in that anti-modern way of theirs. Unfortunately, they were right, as we now know, which brings us back to telepathic centralism—a real cracker.

Instead of issuing MPs with blank ballot papers and trusting them to fill them in correctly—or issuing members with completed ballot papers and trusting them to hand them in correctly, which is how it's usually done—from now on there'll just be one big, central ballot paper, which the leader will complete according to the mentally communicated collective will of his colleagues.

To avoid any possibility of impropriety, this entire "Jobs for the Toys" process will be supervised by the Electoral Deform Society—an absolutely essential precaution, because, for all we know, one day the leader himself might go funny on us, and start giving people jobs for no better reason than that he thought they'd be good at them.

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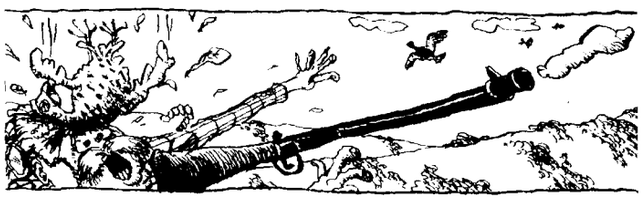

Felix Bennett

What are the chances that you'll get dealt 13 spades? **Paul Sieveking** reports

The odds against being dealt a perfect hand in bridge are 158,753,389,899 to 1; this has not happened in 60 years of professional tournaments, but amateurs seems to have more luck. William McNall got all the hearts in Gateshead in March 1992, as did Pat Lambert in Ludham, Norfolk, in October 1992.

Marcus Benorthan got all the spades in Elburton, near Plymouth, in May 1993. Mr Benorthan, a bridge teacher and retired newsagent, was competing at home with his wife Phyllis and another couple. The cards had been well shuffled by Phyllis, cut by her partner Ann Blades and dealt by Benorthan's partner Brian Blades. The odds quoted by most papers in reporting this event—two thousand million million million million or so to one—were against *all four* players being dealt a perfect hand. Few journalists seem to have much of a handle on probability.

Retired GP Bernard Samuels, 70, got all the clubs in Southport, Merseyside, in August 1993. Gertrude Lutchner shuffled the cards, Bernard cut them and Joe Lutchner dealt them. Raymond Brock, general manager of the English Bridge Union, said (absurdly): "These hands seem to be coming up more often than they should." Of course, it's all in the eye of the beholder: we decide what counts as a significant pattern. Whatever hand one is dealt, the odds against it are astronomical.

I could never make out what all the fuss was about concerning the modish hypothesis that Life As We Know It would not have come about if the temperature of the primaeval soup (or whatever) was one degree different: the odds against *anything* happening, as I see it, are quite staggering. This, however, should not lessen our wonder at the feats of Providence.

Camille Flammerion records the following tale in his charming 1902 book, *The Unknown*. He was sitting at his desk working on a chapter about the force of the wind for his book, *The Atmosphere*. Suddenly, a "miniature whirlwind" carried his papers out of the window and he regarded them as lost. Some days later, he received the proofs of his book, including the missing chapter set up in type. The whirlwind that carried off the chapter had deposited the sheets at the feet of the publisher's assistant, who gathered them up under the impression that he had dropped them.

A similar story was told in the *Bookseller* recently. Carmen Callil, head of Chatto and Windus, had her car broken into one evening just after Christmas 1991 outside a Chinese restaurant in Notting Hill where she was having dinner. The thieves, frightened by the car alarm, ran off with a manuscript and threw it into a garden nearby. Next morning, she had a phone call from one of her authors asking why she had disposed of his manuscript in his own front garden.

Chance encounters and long odds are often compelling though inscrutable. The tale of Sergeant Steve Robertson of the Royal Engineers illustrates this. He was sent to fight in the Gulf war. His grandfather had served in Iraq during the first world war and had a silver Iraqi coin made into a badge by a local silversmith. It was inscribed with his rank, number and "Baghdad 1917-18". Steve took this coin to the war zone for good luck.

While searching through offices ransacked by the retreating Iraqis, he found a coin identical to his grandfather's lying on a floor. He was sent to Bahrain for a few days' rest in April, and decided to do what his grandfather had done 73 years before him. He took the coin to a local silversmith to have it engraved with "Kuwait 1991" and his rank and number.

When he produced the coins in the shop, the silversmith, Ar Al-Roomi, became very excited. He was the grandson of the man who had engraved the first coin! The enamel used to fill in the letters was unique to the family, who had plied their trade for generations and had moved from Baghdad to Bahrain about 30 years earlier. Back home in Dundee, Sergeant Robertson received his engraved coin through the post from Bahrain.

Paul Sieveking is editor of "Fortean Times"

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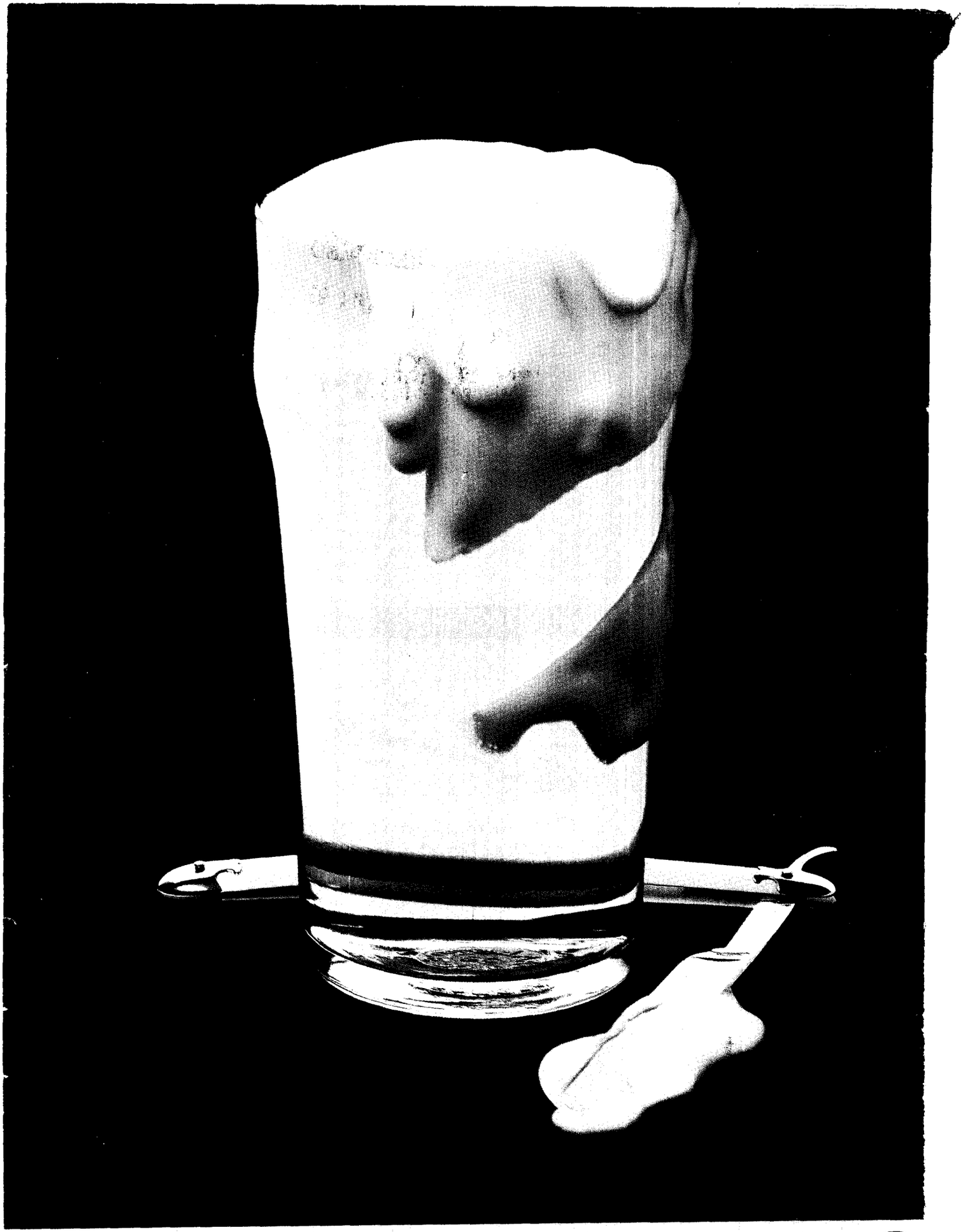

BODDINGTONS. THE CREAM OF MANCHESTER.

Boddingtons Draught Bitter. Brewed at the Strangeways Brewery since 1778.

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